JUNE, 1911

THE CAVALIER

JUNE, 1911

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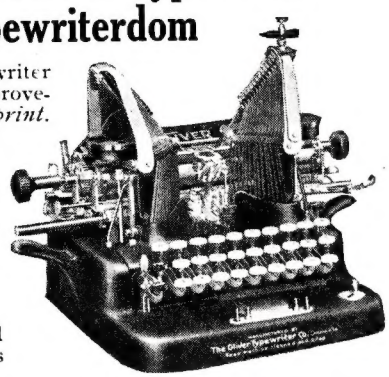

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THE CAVALIER

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175 Fifth Avenue, New York, and Temple House, Temple Avenue, E. C., London
FRANK A. MUNSEY, President. RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary. CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer.

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THE CAVALIER

Vol. IX. JUNE, 1911. No. 1.

A Tale of Lost Streets

By J. Aubrey Tyson

A COMPLETE NOVEL.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE WEB OF DIPLOMACY.

"CHECK!"

The speaker was a beautiful, brown-haired young woman whose chin rested on a slim, daintily molded hand. Her cheeks were flushed, and as she gazed at the chess-board on the table over which she leaned there was a half-resentful expression in her lustrous blue eyes.

Count Gruenberg, secretary to the Hunabian Embassy, thoughtfully fingered the pieces that had been removed from the board to the onyx surface of the table and appeared to be oblivious to the last move of his opponent.

After pausing for several moments, Helen Croyden raised her eyes wonderingly, and said, with some coldness:

"Your king is in check, Count Gruenberg."

The young diplomat turned a half-indifferent glance toward the board. Miss Croyden watched his dark, clean-shaven, handsome face curiously. It was plain that his thoughts had been wandering from the game, and Miss Croyden's eyes flashed ominously.

The charming daughter of Alan Croyden, multimillionaire, so long had been accustomed to receiving the respectful and earnest attention of all persons who were admitted to her society that any indication of flagging interest in her words or actions was likely to excite her wonder.

"Shall we call it a draw?" the count asked quietly.

Coloring slightly, the young woman looked at her opponent even more curiously than before.

"Most certainly not," she replied determinedly. "Your sense of chivalry is delightful, but, hard as I have striven to win the game, it is perfectly clear, of course, that you have beaten me."

Gruenberg raised his brows with an expression of surprise.

"Indeed!" he murmured.

"Certainly," Miss Croyden answered, speaking now more coldly. "I can do nothing to prevent you from moving forward your king's knight's pawn. In two moves it will become a queen. That will mean a mate, of course."

Count Gruenberg nodded.

"And royalty could find no more fitting mate," he answered gravely.

Puzzled by the singular gravity of the count's manner, no less than by the obscurity of his words, Miss Croyden looked at him searchingly.

"I'm afraid I don't quite understand you," she replied.

Gruenberg smiled.

"That which we have mistaken for a pawn is a woman—a very beautiful and potential woman, who, in two moves—as you see—may, by becoming a queen, checkmate a king."

Still perplexed, Miss Croyden laughed perfunctorily.

"She would checkmate the king by becoming his wife?" she asked.

Gruenberg shook his head gravely.

"Oh, no—no; not that!" he exclaimed. "You forget that the King of Hunabia already has a queen."

An expression of blank astonishment overspread Miss Croyden's features.

"But what has the King of Hunabia to do with our game of chess?" she demanded of the count.

Gruenberg shrugged his shoulders.

"Nothing," he replied. "But our game of chess illustrates perfectly a situation that now confronts the King of Hunabia. The chess-board represents the United States—a theater in which several international comedies and tragedies already have been played, and in which a rapidly increasing number may be expected in the future.

"It was here the war between Russia and Japan was brought to a close. It was here that the integrity of Venezuela was preserved and the independence of Panama was won. It is here, too, that impoverished European noblemen obtain funds for the rehabilitation of their estates, and that foreign nations seek loans that will enable them to carry on their wars."

"Quite true," assented Miss Croyden. "But these diplomatic comedies and tragedies seem to me to be as foreign to our game of chess as is the King of Hunabia."

"Well, let us see," Gruenberg went on easily. "This chess-board, then, represents the United States. The black king who is threatened by the pawn that may become queen is Frederick V, King of Hunabia."

"And the pawn?" queried Miss Croyden, looking with narrowing eyes at the count.

"The pawn—the woman—is your most charming self," answered Gruenberg, bowing gravely.

The young woman now was regarding her visitor with the expression of one who suddenly finds that he or she has been talking with a lunatic.

"I'm afraid that I am a little dull this afternoon," she answered, as she sank wearily back in her chair.

"I am not jesting, Miss Croyden—believe me," Gruenberg replied. "I have told you that the king threatened by the white king's pawn is Frederick of Hunabia. You have not asked me who the white king himself may be."

Miss Croyden, starting suddenly, looked at her visitor with widening eyes. She was beginning to understand him now.

"You mean—" she began.

"I mean Leopold of Towardein," said the count.

"Prince Leopold will try to make himself king!" the young woman exclaimed breathlessly.

Gruenberg, nodding, laughed confidently.

"Prince Leopold of Towardein will make himself king," he replied, after a cautious glance at the door. "Frederick V of Hunabia, has about reached the end of the tether that binds him to the throne. As the wife of Leopold II, you may be queen of Hunabia, with twenty million subjects to do you reverence."

Helen Croyden's face grew whiter as she rose.

"Concerning Prince Leopold's ability to seize the throne of Hunabia, I know nothing," she answered coldly. "Whether or not he succeeds in that purpose is a matter of indifference to me. Of one thing, however, I am certain. I will never become his wife."

Gruenberg smiled, shook his head and raised a hand protestingly. He was about to speak when Miss Croyden silenced him with a gesture.

"Had I known that you came here to-day as a representative of Prince Leopold I would not have received you," she went on. "All that I have to say on this subject has been said to Prince Leopold himself."

"Not all, Miss Croyden," Gruenberg replied composedly.

The young woman started and looked at her visitor searchingly.

"Not all?" she murmured.

"No—not all. When his royal highness asked you to be his wife, you refused him. Believe me, there is more to say."

"You mean—"

Count Gruenberg rose, and for several moments he stood silently, with his cold, speculative gaze resting on his astonished and indignant hostess.

"I mean that, even in the United States, the purposes of the future ruler of Hunabia are not to be thwarted by a woman's will," he answered calmly.

Completely dumfounded by the audacity of her visitor, Miss Croyden, breathing quickly, watched him with fascinated eyes.

"I shall be charitable enough to assume that you are not altogether responsible for the words you have just spoken, Count Gruenberg," Miss Croyden finally said. "Concerning the matter to which you have referred, Prince Leopold has had his answer. Our game of chess is finished, I believe, and as our conversation has taken a turn that must prove unsatisfactory to both of us, it is just as well, perhaps, that we end it now. Good afternoon!"

Miss Croyden was moving toward the door when the quiet voice of Gruenberg again reached her ears and caused her to pause.

"A moment, please, Miss Croyden," said the diplomat. "When you have heard a little more you will understand that the situation which now confronts you is not one on which a woman who is wise will turn her back. The Croyden honor, as well as the Croyden fortune, is at stake."

"There can be no doubt of that, sir, if they are in danger of being linked with the name of Leopold of Towardein," the young woman retorted.

"It is best that there should be no hard words, Miss Croyden," he replied in a conciliatory tone. "It is true that the estates of Prince Leopold are somewhat heavily encumbered just now, but in another six months all will be different. Against the honor of his family, however, nothing can be said by any one. That family is one of the most ancient and honorable in all Europe.

"The prince is a cousin to the present King of Hunabia, and his father was the rightful heir to the throne. As a claimant to that throne Leopold has the support of the masses, as well as that of some of the most powerful members of the Hunabian nobility."

"As an American woman, I have little interest in Hunabian affairs," said Miss Croyden indifferently. "Prince Leopold perfectly understands the reasons for my refusal."

"He is a handsome, manly, courageous—"

"His is a courage, however, that has been displayed principally at card-tables and in the defiance of customs which characterize the social relations of self-respecting men and women," the fair American retorted.

Gruenberg flushed angrily.

"Be careful—lest you go too far," he commanded sharply. "Not even in this country of yours are his wishes to be thwarted. That which is denied to him as a man he will take as a prince."

"You — you mean that I will be compelled to become his wife — against my

will?" the astonished young woman falteringly replied.

"Yes," Gruenberg answered grimly. "Within a month Miss Croyden will have become the Princess Helen of Towardein."

Bowing gravely and with deference, the count then left the room.

Completely dazed by the daring insolence of her visitor, Helen Croyden stood as if she had been turned to stone; then, breathing heavily, and trembling with agitation, she sank limply on a chair.

And so, for many minutes, she sat in deep and perplexing thought.

CHAPTER II.

A MIDNIGHT SUMMONS.

HALF an hour before midnight on the night of the day following the interview of Helen Croyden and Count Gruenberg, Edward Ludgrave, after an evening spent at his club, entered his luxuriously appointed bachelor quarters in Fifth Avenue. With him was his friend Clive Fenwood.

The latter crossed over to the fireplace and wheeled a chair in front of the cheerfully burning gas log. Ludgrave followed slowly.

In appearance the two young men offered a striking contrast. Ludgrave, about twenty-six years of age, was of medium height, trimly built, dark-haired, gray-eyed, and with a thoughtful, resolute face which was well-molded and indicative of refinement.

Fenwood was an Englishman, of twenty-nine or thirty, blond-haired, blue-eyed, tall, broad-shouldered, and somewhat sluggish in his movements. Ludgrave, the only son of a New York banker who had died two years before, had been educated for the law but never had practised. With the income of the well-invested fortune left to him by his father, he had given full play to his fondness for travel. It was while returning from a trip abroad that he had met Fenwood, a little more than six months before.

Fenwood was a younger son of a wealthy English baronet, and for a time he had served in the British army in India. He explained that by relinquishing his commission he had offended his father, who sent him off to America to live on an income of five thousand dollars a year. Ludgrave and he were often together, but to their mutual acquaintances it was plain that for this seeming intimacy the Englishman was responsible. Ludgrave seldom sought Fenwood, who was rarely visited at his rooms by any one, but scarcely a day passed that did not bring the two young men together when both were in town. Sometimes they met at their club, the room of a friend, or at a theater. At other times Fenwood would drop in on Ludgrave in his apartments.

To-night Fenwood had been at the opera, and had entered the club just as Ludgrave was in the act of leaving.

As the two men seated themselves in front of the fireplace, Fenwood, thumbing some tobacco into his pipe, asked carelessly:

"Are you going to see the opera from the Croyden box to-morrow night, Ned?"

"I'm afraid not, Fen," replied the other shortly.

"Afraid not, eh?" Fenwood muttered, as he lighted his pipe. "Why, I thought you—"

"It was suggested last week by Miss Croyden, but—oh, well, it is just possible that she has forgotten it."

Fenwood puffed at his brier and frowned slightly as he gazed into the fireplace.

"She hasn't forgotten it," he said shortly.

Coloring slightly, Ludgrave looked at the Englishman sharply.

"Indeed!" he muttered curtly.

"No," drawled Fenwood. He paused, then added: "Ned, do you know that sometimes I think you are a fool?"

"And why?"

"Whether or not you are playing a part, I don't know, of course. But, for a long time, it has been plain enough to me, and to several other fellows as well, that the heiress and her millions might be yours for the asking."

Ludgrave's eyes flashed angrily.

"You—and others—have been discussing the subject, then," he said.

Fenwood shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, naturally," he replied.

"But you have never met Miss Croyden," said Ludgrave.

"No. Thanks to you, however, I have met others who have met her, and all these seem to agree that so far as the Croyden matrimonial stake is concerned, there are only two in the running—yourself and the

Hunabian fellow—Prince Leopold of Towardein."

The color faded quickly from Ludgrave's face.

"Leopold seems to be running for all he's worth, but you—you— Why, hang it, man, you seem to be pulling up—losing your stride — deliberately throwing the race," the Englishman went on.

"You're over your ears in love with the girl, but—well, you're something of a gipsy, aren't you, Ned? You like your liberty — like to wander over the earth. Clipping twenty - five thousand dollars' worth of coupons each year enables you to more than meet your expenses and brings you as much in touch with the commercial world as you care to be. The thought of being partly responsible for the handling of the Croyden fortune, when the old man dies, makes the heiress seem just a little too formidable to you, doesn't it?"

Flushing angrily, Ludgrave rose abruptly.

"If you are going to keep up this sort of thing, Fen, I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to hurry and finish your pipe," he said.

The Englishman laughed mirthlessly. He was about to speak when his attention was diverted by the entrance of Dodson, the valet, who, approaching Ludgrave, held out a visiting-card. As Ludgrave, taking the card, glanced at the name inscribed upon it, he started slightly, and an expression of wonder settled on his face.

"The gentleman presents his compliments and says he would like to see you in private, sir," explained the valet.

Ludgrave glanced at the stolidly smoking Englishman and hesitated.

"Fen, I have a visitor who would like to have a few words with me," he said. "Step into my room for a few minutes, will you?"

Fenwood rose quickly.

"All right, old man," he said, and started toward the room his host had indicated. As he reached the door, however, he turned and looked over his shoulder.

"If your visitor—" he began, but he stopped abruptly.

The front door of the sitting-room had opened, and through it came a sparsely-built man of medium height. He wore a heavy, fur-trimmed overcoat, and the upturned collar of this partly concealed his features. Removing his hat, he revealed a high, broad brow and a tangled mass of iron-gray hair. For a moment, looking from Ludgrave to his other visitor, the newcomer seemed to hesitate; then, moving deliberately, he turned down his collar.

Fenwood, giving a little start, caught his breath quickly. The man in the overcoat, with an unearthly pallor on his clean-shaven face, and a strange, wild light gleaming in his dark, searching eyes, was none other than Alan Croyden, one of the most powerful captains of finance in the United States.

Quickly recovering his self - possession, the Englishman turned the knob on which his hand was resting, and disappeared into the bedchamber of his host.

Croyden, slowly unbuttoning his coat, watched the valet as, stepping into the hall, he closed the door behind him. When the two men were alone, the elder walked deliberately in the direction of the younger.

"I'm glad I found you in, my boy," he said in a voice that shook a little. "I was afraid—"

The rest of the sentence died on his lips; then, with something that was like a groan, he abruptly divested himself of his coat and threw it on a chair. Ludgrave, mystified by this midnight visit and somewhat alarmed by the pallor and apparent agitation of his guest, watched him curiously, anxiously, and in silence.

At length, seating himself in the chair which the Englishman had just vacated. Croyden turned to his young host again.

"The fellow who went into the other room is that young Englishman who is so often seen with you, I suppose," he said abruptly.

"Clive Fenwood—yes," Ludgrave replied as he reseated himself in the chair from which he had risen just before the millionaire had entered the room.

"Is he to be trusted?" demanded Croyden seriously.

"Why—yes—I think so," the young man answered with a little laugh. "Fenwood is a pretty good fellow whom I have known for the last six months. Do you wish to meet him?"

"No," said the other, almost fiercely. "I should have been satisfied if I had found you here alone."

After fumbling in one of his pockets, Croyden drew out a cigar-case, and from this he thoughtfully took a long, black cigar. He returned the case to his pocket abstractedly, and then lighted the cigar which he had taken out. For several moments he

smoked in silence. His voice was shaking slightly again as, without removing his gaze from the fire, he said shortly:

"My boy—Ned—I knew your father."

"I have heard my father speak of that acquaintance, sir," the young man answered quietly.

"We never had any common business interests, however, and in the last twenty years of his life we seldom met," the millionaire went on. "When I heard my daughter speak of you, I became interested in you at once. I even went so far as to make certain inquiries, among those who knew you best, concerning your character and mode of life.

"I was not sorry to learn that you had found sufficient for your needs the estate that was left to you by your father. Your father was a wise man; I was a fool. Your father's life was one of peace and plenty; mine has been one of superfluous wealth and constant war.

"Five years ago I became a widower, and then I realized that all my millions could not buy for me the happiness I had lost. My daughter, however, has been spared to me, and now—now—"

He turned toward Ludgrave a face that was twitching convulsively as he added, in a voice that was scarcely louder than a whisper:

"And now, as if to punish me for my past neglect of domestic blessings, fate seems to exact of me the sacrifice of my daughter."

Ludgrave's face grew as white as Croyden's own.

"You—you mean—" he stammered.

"I mean that twice to-day I have found myself on the verge of yielding to one of the most cruel temptations that can be offered to a father," Croyden replied through his parched lips. "Twice I have resisted, but — oh, my boy, I am weaker than I knew. That is why, in my last, desperate struggle to end all honorably, I have come to you."

"But how—how can I—" the young man began falteringly.

"Before the sun rises on another day, Helen must be a wife," said Croydon huskily.

Stiffening suddenly, Ludgrave looked with widening eyes at the trembling millionaire.

"You would have her marry—whom?" he asked.

"You," Alan Croyden said, and rose.

Ludgrave, rising also, was breathing heavily.

"Does Helen — does Miss Croyden know?" he asked.

"No — no," Croyden answered weakly. "But I have read her heart, and I know—I know she loves you. She will not oppose our wishes, Ned—believe me. Before coming to see you to-night, I made the necessary arrangements for the ceremony which will be performed within the next two hours in Jersey City.

"Helen is at Mrs. Gurney's ball, and when she leaves it she will go with us across the river, and it is in Jersey that both of you must remain until it is time to board the Krakonia, which sails at ten. You and Helen must leave the ship upon its arrival at Fishguard, and seclude yourselves in England, keeping all knowledge of your whereabouts from your most intimate friends, and from me.

"Your marriage must be regarded by the world as incident to elopement. It must not be known by any one that I favored it—that I will be in possession of any information concerning the ceremony or your departure for Europe."

Half tottering, Croyden crossed to where he had left his overcoat, and raised it from the chair.

"You must take no luggage with you from here to-night, Ned," he said. "All that you require for the voyage must be purchased on the other side of the river while you are waiting to board the vessel."

Moving like a man in a dream, Ludgrave, without speaking, crossed to the door of his bedroom for the purpose of exchanging his evening dress for a sack suit. As he reached his door, however, he saw that it was standing ajar. He halted suddenly, and then drew back.

When Fenwood had entered this apartment, the sound of the closing of the door had reached Ludgrave's ears distinctly, and he remembered now that it had done so. He still was wondering how it had happened that the door had been opened again, when it closed softly before his eyes, and he heard the click of the catch.

Had the Englishman started to leave the room and then retreated without having overheard any of the more important of Croyden's words, or had he been eavesdropping?

With a rush of suddenly inspired anger, Ludgrave opened the door abruptly. Fen-

wood, now somewhat less florid than he had been earlier in the evening, was in the act of seating himself at the farther side of the room.

"What have you been doing, Fen?" Ludgrave demanded curtly, as he closed the door behind him.

"Walking the floor—smoking—reading a bit, Ned," the other answered carelessly. "Has your visitor gone?"

His gaze fell before Ludgrave's searching eyes.

"No," replied the American coldly. "When he leaves, I will accompany him. I have come in here to change my clothes, but I must ask you to remain in this room until after my friend and I leave the house."

"As you please, old chap," said Fenwood with a little shrug.

The exchange of garments soon was effected. As Ludgrave again started toward the door, he turned to Fenwood.

"Is the identity of my visitor known to you, Fen?" he asked.

The Englishman stifled a yawn.

"Why, no," he said. "I glanced over my shoulder as I came in here, and saw what appeared to me a middle-aged gentleman who was muffled in a big top-coat—that's all."

Ludgrave still hesitated.

"And you heard nothing of our conversation?" he asked.

"How could I have heard it through the closed door?" the other asked, with an accent of irritation.

Ludgrave's face grew whiter, and his eyes gleamed wrathfully. He had seen the closing of the door, and he knew that Fenwood was lying.

Among the articles which Fenwood always carried with him was a combination knife. One of the blades of this was curiously rounded and pointed like an arrow, and with it, in moments of abstraction, the Englishman was wont to carve certain lines on the back of his pipe-bowl. These lines invariably assumed the form of the head of a sphinx. It was at one of these heads that Fenwood, blowing smoke-rings, was stolidly gazing now.

Words of accusation and denunciation were trembling on Ludgrave's lips, but he resolutely held them back. While Alan Croyden waited, there must be no quarrel with Fenwood. Though many weeks might pass before he would see the Englishman again, the quarrel would wait.

Without speaking, therefore, the young man turned slowly on his heel and left the room.

CHAPTER III.

THE HAND OF THE ENEMY.

UPON reaching the sitting-room, Ludgrave found that Croyden was ready for the street.

"You did not tell your friend who I was?" Croyden asked anxiously, as the bedroom door closed behind his host.

"No—I did not tell him," the young man answered moodily.

"That is well," said Croyden. "It will be best, too, not to tell your man that when you leave to-night you do not expect to return. You may write a letter of instructions to him in the morning, and I will see that it is delivered promptly. Now get on your hat and overcoat, and let us go."

Three minutes later the two men crossed the sidewalk in front of the building and entered a large automobile that was drawn up at the curb. Without addressing the chauffeur, who apparently already had received his instructions, Croyden seated himself beside Ludgrave in the tonneau.

The journey to the Croyden home was made in silence. The millionaire sat with his chin on his breast, and Ludgrave stared with dazed eyes into nothingness.

The thoughts of the young man were in a tumult. That Helen Croyden suddenly had been threatened with some grave danger was manifest from the strange agitation which had overcome her father, but of the nature of this danger Ludgrave was wholly ignorant, and there was something in the aspect of the man who sat beside him which seemed to forbid interrogatories at the present time.

For many months his love for Helen Croyden had tortured him with doubt and despair. Time and again he had been on the point of asking her to be his wife, but on each occasion certain reflections had restrained him. Bright and vivacious as she was, he knew her to be a woman of high ideals, but the glamour of society was round her, and it disquieted him. For society he cared little, and he reflected that to most women it was all. With all his love for Helen Croyden, he often doubted whether his tastes and those of a society belle would not, sooner or later, lead them apart.

Then, too, the ardor of Ludgrave's almost involuntary wooing had been chilled by the attentions which Helen Croyden had received from Leopold, Prince of Towardein. It was generally known that Leopold had come to the United States to marry an heiress whose fortune would be sufficient to rehabilitate his heavily encumbered estates. In the character of the prince there was much that was to be regarded as objectionable. He was reputed to be as unscrupulous as he was extravagant, but his lively wit, uniform courtesy, fine figure, handsome features, and dark, flashing eyes, constituted a combination which few women were able to resist, and he was scarcely less popular with men than with the members of the gentler sex.

The attentions which Leopold lavished upon Helen Croyden left little doubt in the minds of those who observed. And, as the prince's suit grew more and more determined and generally recognized, Edward Ludgrave, appreciating the superior claims of his rival, gave to him the right of way.

Nearly all the evening, Helen Croyden had been in Ludgrave's thoughts. He fancied that twice within the last few days she had deliberately slighted him. On Monday she had invited him to attend a dinner which she was giving to a party of friends on Wednesday evening, but on Wednesday morning he had received from her a note in which she requested him not to call at her house until Thursday afternoon. On Thursday morning he had learned that the dinner had been given, and that all the other guests who had been invited were present.

When he had called on Thursday afternoon, she had sent word that she was indisposed and would be unable to see any one. It was Friday now, and though he had been invited to be one of the party in the Croydon box at the opera on the following evening, he had been a little in doubt as to whether or not his presence there would be desirable.

Then—what was the reason for Croyden's strange actions to-night? Why was such secrecy to be observed? How did it happen that Helen's consent to this strange proceeding had not been obtained? Why were they to spend the night in New Jersey, and then go abroad and live in seclusion like a pair of fugitives from justice?

Anxious as he was to have these questions answered, the young man realized that, even had his companion been in a mood to reply to them, they could not be properly discussed in the swiftly moving, noisy automobile.

When the Croyden mansion was reached, both men alighted quickly, and, at a word from Croyden, the automobile hurried off again. Croyden led his companion into the house, and, without removing their coats, they went into the library. Here the millionaire pressed a button, and the butler appeared.

"Has Miss Croyden returned?" Croyden asked.

The butler replied in the negative.

"When she comes, tell her that I desire to see her at once," the millionaire said. "That's all, Wilken."

The butler left the room. Croyden was in the act of unbuttoning his overcoat when his attention was attracted by an envelope that lay on his desk. This was addressed to him and was marked: "Personal and Important."

Croyden picked up the envelope and looked at it curiously. Scarcely had he unfolded the sheet it contained, when a low, sharp cry issued from his lips; an expression of horror overspread his pallid face, and his hands began to tremble. Line by line he read the letter with nervous haste. When he was done, he raised his head.

As he turned his gaze toward Ludgrave his eyes seemed to have sunk deeper into their sockets, and his face had the appearance of a waxen mask. In a voice that was scarcely louder than a whisper, he said:

"It is too late, my boy—too late!"

A thousand baleful lights seemed to flash before the young man's eyes. The figure of Croyden grew indistinct, and his voice seemed to come from a distance. Ludgrave felt as if the earth suddenly had fallen from beneath his feet, leaving him hovering in space.

"Too late!" he gasped.

"I mean that the sacrifice I purposed making to-night is vain," Croyden answered solemnly. "I mean that death and dishonor are my portion, and a soul-damning marriage is the portion of my daughter, who, even now, may have become the wife of that infamous scoundrel, Leopold of Towardein!"

"Helen—Miss Croyden has eloped with Leopold?" the wonder-stricken young man demanded breathlessly.

"No — no!" cried Croyden stridently. "She despises—she abhors him! It was only by violence that he could hope to attain his end. My poor girl—my Helen—has been abducted. She is in the grip of the Falconbund!"

For several moments the silence was unbroken. Frozen with horror, Ludgrave was incapable of speech or motion. Slowly, Croyden seemed to decrease in stature as he raised a trembling hand to his head; then, with a low groan, he sank into the chair that stood before his desk.

"The Falconbund!" he murmured.

The name of this powerful Hunabian secret society was one that had blanched the cheeks of thousands of brave men on two continents. More powerful and more sinister than the dreaded Mafia of Italy, it had inspired fear among legislators, judges, and the police. Its threats were never vain, and when it struck, its blows were delivered quickly, accurately, and so mysteriously that the identity of its agents seldom was discovered.

The police, and even the United States Secret Service, had been unable to discover its officers. Several bold men had essayed the task of identifying the members of the Falconbund's council, but those who survived the attempt — and they were few — were wisely silent concerning their experiences.

"But the Falconbund—the Falconbund is an organization of criminals," Ludgrave stammered. "Surely, Leopold, with all his faults—"

"The Falconbund has espoused the cause of Leopold of Towardein as a claimant to the throne of Hunabia."

"And Leopold—"

"Leopold, having been twice rejected by my daughter, is still determined to wed her and to ruin me."

"But why?"

"He requires funds to finance the revolution which he has planned. In a communication which I had from him this morning, he demanded not only my consent to his immediate marriage to Helen, but the payment by me of fifty million dollars to him within the next thirty days. I ridiculed both propositions, of course. Two hours later, however, I received a communication from the Falconbund."

Ludgrave, breathing heavily, now sank, for the first time, into a chair.

"The Falconbund gave me two days in which to accede to the demands that had been made upon me by Leopold," Croyden went on. "Coupled with this demand was a threat. I was informed that if I failed to grant, within the stipulated period, all that was required of me, sentence of death would be passed upon me by the council of the organization, and that my execution would follow in less than a week, no matter what precautions I might take to guard against the approach of the society's agents."

"Well?" Ludgrave demanded faintly, as the trembling millionaire paused.

Croyden shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, the proposition involved either the sacrifice of my daughter and the payment of fifty million dollars, or the forfeiture of my life," he said. "Fifty millions is a sum not easily raised, even by a man as rich as Alan Croyden—but it might be done. My daughter will inherit all I have, and Leopold of Towardein has planned to make my daughter Queen of Hunabia. Do you blame me for hesitating, my boy?"

Shaking like a wind-smitten leaf, Ludgrave hid his face in his hands.

"The Falconbund — the Falconbund!" he murmured.

In a raised voice, Croyden went on:

"Yet—yet, to-night, when I looked at the portrait of Helen's mother, I resolved that the sacrifice that had been demanded of me should be made. I would yield my life to the Falconbund, rather than yield my honor —the Croyden honor—to the hands of those who threatened me.

"That is why I went to you. You, I know, would not regret the loss of my entire fortune, if Helen became your wife, and, once your wife, before the Falconbund had addressed any threat to her, Helen might be permitted to live with you—in peace."

As Ludgrave lowered the hands that had covered his face, Croyden saw that an expression of grimness was settling on the young man's features. He sat more upright, and his fingers gripped the arms of his chair.

"And now?" Ludgrave asked.

The elder man shook his head hopelessly.

"And now the choice which was offered me is gone," he said brokenly. "I delayed my action until it was too late."

Ludgrave rose and slowly paced the floor. For several moments neither spoke.

"But the letter—the letter you received when you were expecting Helen?" the

young man asked abstractedly. "Was it from the Falconbund?"

Croyden nodded.

"Yes—yes, it was from the Falconbund," he said. "You may read it, Ned."

Ludgrave took the letter which the millionaire held out to him, and read:

DEAR SIR:

Having been informed that you made arrangements this afternoon for a secret marriage ceremony in Jersey City at an early hour to-morrow morning, and also of your purchase of two steamship tickets for a vessel which is scheduled to sail a few hours later, the Falconbund believes it has found evidence of your intention to attempt to elude its vigilance prior to a refusal to accept the terms proposed in its last communication to you.

The society, therefore, has found it expedient to act in a manner that will preclude all further evasion or duplicity on your part, and to this end it has persuaded your daughter to accept its protection for the time being. In order that you may assure yourself that no harm has befallen Miss Croyden, and also that the young lady may have an opportunity to convince you that your present course is inimical to your interest, as well as her own, the Falconbund will accord you the privilege of three interviews with her, assuring you safe conduct to the place at which Miss Croyden now is residing, and also an equally safe return to your own residence.

At two o'clock in the morning following the departure of Miss Croyden from her home, a cab, bearing a blue light, will three times pass your door. If you desire to visit your daughter, you will hail and enter the cab, which will take you to her. If, however, you are guilty of any act that may have for its object the arrest or shadowing of the chauffeur, the consequences of that act will speedily be visited upon both you and your daughter. THE FALCONBUND.

Ludgrave read the letter twice, then, without speaking, he laid it on the desk on which the millionaire was leaning.

Croyden's face was hidden in his hands, and it needed only a glance to convince his visitor that the spirit of the domineering master of American finance was broken. He had been left desolate in the magnificent home he had built for those he loved.

When Alan Croyden raised his head again, he saw that he was alone. A sudden chill smote him, and he pressed an electric button on his desk.

The butler responded.

"Wilken, I must have more light in here," said Croyden petulantly. "Miss Croyden will not be back to-night, but maybe—maybe I will go to her. They are lying to me—I know—I know—for once they get me in their grip, they will not let me go. And yet my hand must not be snatched from the helm to-night—in the interest of others. They have promised me three opportunities to visit her, and I am passing one. I dare not—dare not go—to-night."

He sank wearily back in his chair and passed a hand over his eyes. From his drawn lips came a series of low, sobbing sounds.

The butler approached him solicitously.

"You are ill to-night, sir?" he asked.

Croyden straightened himself suddenly.

"I must not stay here alone!" he exclaimed, almost fiercely. "Why did Ned Ludgrave leave me? How long has he been gone?"

The butler, shaking his head dubiously, glanced round the room. He gave a little start.

"Why, I think he is not gone, sir," the man replied. "His hat and overcoat still are on the chair, sir."

Following the direction of the butler's glance, Croyden saw that the hat and overcoat were where the young man had placed them when he first entered the room.

"But if he is not gone, where—where is he, Wilken?"

Again the butler shook his head.

"You brought in your own hat and coat, sir, did you not?" Wilken asked.

"Yes — yes, Wilken, I brought them here."

"But, sir, they—they are gone. And yet they are so unlike the ones Mr. Ludgrave wore, sir, that he certainly would not have made the mistake of taking them for his own."

"No—no! He's no such fool, and yet—"

Croyden stopped abruptly as his gaze fell on a little clock on his desk.

"Ten minutes after two!" he exclaimed incredulously. "Why, then the blue-light cab has come and gone, and I—but no—it may not be too late. By Heaven, if there still is a chance remaining, I will go to her. I—"

Mechanically he reached toward the place where he had left his hat. Again he realized that it was gone.

"Wilken—" he began, and stopped. His eyes grew wider as he rose slowly and looked toward the door.

"Ned — Ned — took them," he faltered. "He wore them that he might enter the blue-light cab and brave the Falconbund!"

The butler stiffened suddenly as his master pronounced the dreaded name.

"The Falconbund!" he gasped.

A moment later the wondering butler stared quickly toward the millionaire.

Croyden's chin had sunk upon his breast, and he was clutching at the empty air.

Then, limp and unconscious, he fell back on the chair from which he had risen.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BLUE-LIGHT CAB.

ALAN CROYDEN'S suspicion was well-founded. While the millionaire, overwhelmed with grief and despair, had been sitting with bowed head at his desk, Ludgrave had quietly picked up the silk hat and fur-lined overcoat and had left the room. Not until he stood in the vestibule, however, did he put them on; then, with a glance behind him to assure himself that his passage through the hall had been unobserved, he opened the street door and descended the steps.

It was now five minutes before two o'clock in the morning, and no sign of life was apparent along the silent thoroughfare. A chill wind was blowing, and the young man turned up the collar of the coat and drew on the gloves he found in one of the pockets.

Minute after minute passed without affording him a sight or sound of the vehicle for which he was watching. For the first time since Alan Croyden had visited him in his rooms, the young man was thoroughly self-possessed. The action he was taking was not the result of impulse, but of sober judgment and a calculation of the chances in his favor and those against him.

He was unarmed, and, therefore, he could not hope to overcome violence with violence. He might persuade Helen's abductor to allow him to interview her, and, by pretending to represent Croyden, he might obtain some clue that would result in the arrest of the persons who were responsible for the young woman's detention.

It was with a steady hand that he took out and lighted a cigar. Scarcely had he thrown the match away when he saw something which he had been momentarily expecting.

It was a slowly moving automobile, which was approaching him from the north.

For several moments, however, the young man was unable to tell whether it was a taxicab or a larger machine, but the two yellow sidelights were of a nature that led him to infer that it was a taxicab. No blue light was visible, at first, but, as he gazed, a sudden thrill passed over him. Between the two yellow lights appeared a blue one.

The vehicle was in the service of the Falconbund.

Puffing a little more vigorously at his cigar, Ludgrave walked deliberately toward the curb. Slower and slower became the pace of the taxicab, which finally halted in front of him.

"Cab, sir?" asked the chauffeur.

"Yes—yes," replied the young man, attempting to counterfeit Alan Croyden's manner and voice.

Ludgrave was about to step into the vehicle, when the man spoke again.

"Where do you want to go?" he inquired.

"You have your instructions, I believe," Ludgrave answered shortly. "Your cab carries a blue light, does it not?"

"You are the party I am to take to Wâlpole Street?"

"If it is there Alan Croyden is expected —yes."

"It's all right then, sir," said the man, touching his cap respectfully.

Ludgrave entered the taxi and closed the door. In another moment the machine was under way. It proceeded slowly at first, and its passenger suspected that the chauffeur was attempting to assure himself that no other vehicle was stationed in one of the cross streets for the purpose of starting in pursuit as soon as his own should be fairly headed for his destination. When two cross streets were passed, however, the speed was rapidly increased.

At Seventy-Ninth Street the taxi started eastward, and continued on until Broadway was reached, then along Broadway it passed into Columbus Circle, where it turned into Eighth Avenue and speeded southward. When Twenty-Third Street was left behind, Ludgrave found himself entering a part of the city through which he had passed only when he had been on his way to steamship piers. At a steady pace the taxicab continued on through Chelsea and old Greenwich Village until it reached the point where Eighth Avenue merges into Hudson Street. Thence its course lay along Hudson.

Ludgrave had been smoking vigorously, and the atmosphere of the interior of the cab was so charged with the fumes of stale smoke that it had become oppressive.

The young man accordingly attempted to lower one of the windows. The big glass was immovable, and he relinquished the effort.

"Walpole Street — Walpole Street," he murmured. "The name is new to me on this side of the Atlantic. The only Walpole Street of which I have heard is in London."

The speed of the cab now was suddenly slackened, and, moving slowly, it began to round a corner. Glancing at a lamp-post, Ludgrave saw that the vehicle was entering Laight Street. It continued along this for only a block, and then again turned to the right. Another lettered lamp-post gave the occupant of the taxi to understand that he now was in Varick Street. The name of this was more familiar to him.

In front of a lofty, dark-columned church portico the taxi stopped at last. Looking upward, Ludgrave saw the outlines of a tall, graceful spire. In front of the portico was a flag-paved yard which was separated from the street by a high, iron-railed fence.

The young man, looking round him wonderingly, saw the chauffeur leap lightly to the ground, and a few moments later he heard him tinkering with the mechanism under the cab. Moved by a desire to clear the atmosphere of the cab, no less than to learn how far he still was from his destination, Ludgrave attempted to open the door next to the sidewalk in front of the church.

This was as immovable as the window had been. He was about to try the other door, when the chauffeur, from the outside, opened the one from which he was in the act of turning.

"Were you trying to get out, sir?" the man asked.

Ludgrave drew the high fur collar of Alan Croyden's overcoat closer round his face.

"Yes," he answered querulously. "What's the matter with the door?"

"It opens a little hard, at times, but—but we have a little farther to go."

"Where are we now? "

"In front of St. John's Chapel, in Varick Street."

"How long will it be before we get to Walpole Street?"

"It's only a minute's ride from here, sir," replied the man.

Ludgrave sank back in his seat. The chauffeur closed the door and resumed his position at the wheel. A moment later the taxi was under way again.

Was it the knowledge that his meeting with members of the Falconbund was so imminent that caused the young man's heart to flutter so strangely? Despite the heavy overcoat he wore, he shivered slightly, and was surprised to find that his hands and feet were numb. Breathing quickly, he puffed hard at his cigar, only to find that it had gone out.

As he relighted it, the taxi slowly rounded another corner. The young man glanced at the lamp-post. On this appeared the name "Walpole Street."

Four or five dingy buildings were passed, then, moving so slowly that it was apparent that the cab was on the point of halting, it passed around still another corner, turning to the right as it did so. Here a lamp-sign indicated "King's Court."

About thirty yards farther on the taxi stopped.

The sidewalk at which the taxi had drawn up was on its right, but before Ludgrave made a move to open the door, the chauffeur, who had leaped from the box, performed that office for him.

"Here you are, sir—right up those steps—and ring the bell," the man said cheerfully.

Ludgrave alighted gingerly, as he thought Alan Croyden might have done in the circumstances. The steps to which the chauffeur referred led to the doorway of an old Colonial house that was three stories in height. Ludgrave ascended the steps deliberately, then pushed an electric button at the right of the door.

As he turned to look again at the vehicle that had brought him to the house, he saw that it already was beginning to move off.

The street was dimly lighted by several gas-lamps, which, however, enabled the young man to see that "King's Court" was, indeed, little more than a courtyard, being surrounded by buildings except at the point in which it was entered by "Walpole Street."

The taxi, having rounded the Walpole Street corner, had just disappeared from view when Ludgrave heard the click of the latch of the door in front of which he was standing. A moment later the opening of the door revealed a small, darkened hall, which was lighted only by the green bulb of an incandescent lamp.

Though Ludgrave looked searchingly at

the person by whom the door was opened he was unable to tell whether it was a man or woman. Without speaking, the stranger stepped back and motioned to the visitor to enter.

Ludgrave did so. As the door was closed behind him, he saw that the person who had admitted him wore a long chauffeur's coat, a golf-cap, and a gray, gauze mask.

"Into the parlor, please," directed the stranger quietly, and the voice was that of a man.

With his collar still upturned, and without removing his hat, Ludgrave passed through the doorway which his guide had indicated.

The young man now found himself in a large, square room which, like the hall, was lighted only by a green lamp. This dimly revealed a set of old-fashioned hair-cloth, mahogany furniture, a dark carpet, a square piano, oil portraits of a man and woman who were dressed in garments which were fashionable in the middle of the nineteenth century, some steel engravings, and a family Bible and several photograph albums which lay on a mahogany table in the center of the apartment. At the rear of the room was a broad archway in which hung two heavy, dark-colored portières.

The rattle of rings on a curtain — pole caused the young man to glance quickly in the direction of the archway. Between the parted portières appeared the figure of a man of about Ludgrave's height.

The newcomer wore a long, gray ulster and a fur cap which came well down over his ears. His face was concealed by a black mask.

As Ludgrave turned, he saw the other give a little start. Though the visitor still was partly disguised by the hat and upturned collar of Alan Croyden's coat, it was plain that the man between the portières had seen enough to convince him that he was confronting some person other than the millionaire.

For a moment Ludgrave's gaze rested on the left hand, which grasped one of the heavy curtains. The hand was ungloved, and on one of the fingers was a ring in which was set a large emerald, encircled by diamonds.

On two former occasions a similar ring had attracted Ludgrave's attention. It then had been worn by Count Gruenberg, secretary of the Hunabian Embassy.

Ludgrave calmly turned down the collar of his coat; then he removed his hat. The masked man stepped forward and, as the portières fell behind him, he thrust his hands into the pockets of his ulster.

It was the voice of Gruenberg that said:

"The servant who admitted you failed to give me your card."

"He also failed to ask me for one," Ludgrave answered quietly. "My name, however, is Edward Ludgrave."

For several moments Gruenberg was silent; then he asked:

"How does it happen that you are here? What is your purpose in visiting this house?"

"I am here representing a gentleman who was expected to meet you, I believe."

"Indeed! And who is the gentleman to whom you refer?"

"Mr. Alan Croyden."

"Oh!" exclaimed Gruenberg softly. "Mr. Croyden has taken you into his confidence, then."

"Yes—so far as the matter of his invitation to this house was concerned."

"Well, as the representative of Mr. Croyden, what is it you have to say?"

"I have come to receive, in his behalf, assurance of his daughter's safety, and to ask for him a continuance of the period that has been given to him for reflection on the proposals which have been made to him by Leopold of Towardein and his friends."

"Why did not Mr. Croyden come himself?"

"Because, solicitous as he is concerning the welfare of his daughter, he feels that his responsibility to others—to hundreds of persons whose financial interests are in his hands—must restrain him from taking any risks at the present time."

"He was promised safe conduct to and from this house."

Ludgrave shrugged his shoulders slightly as he returned:

"By the Falconbund?"

"The Falconbund always keeps its word."

"It never failed to do when it pledged itself to the commission of a crime," Ludgrave assented.

The eyes behind the mask were watching the visitor speculatively. There was a pause.

"What is it you have to ask of the Falconbund?" Gruenberg asked.

"The privilege of seeing Miss Croyden and of learning from her lips that she has sustained no injury while she was being abducted by the friends of Leopold of Towardein. I will also ask to have an extension of time for Mr. Croyden's consideration of Prince Leopold's demands."

Gruenberg hesitated.

"I must have an opportunity to consult with others before I can accede to your demands," the count replied. "I will return to you presently."

He left the room, and again the visitor found himself alone. Still holding his hat and gloves, he seated himself and gazed thoughtfully at the floor.

Nearly five minutes passed before Gruenberg returned. When he reappeared it was in the manner he had done before.

Ludgrave rose.

"In reply to your requests, the Falconbund grants you permission to see Miss Croyden for five minutes, but it will allow Mr. Croyden only forty-eight hours in which to accede to its demands for the marriage of Miss Croyden to Prince Leopold and an agreement to pay to Prince Leopold the sum of fifty millions within the next thirty days," Gruenberg explained. "The agreement must be in the form of a marriage settlement, and it must be executed in a manner that will leave no doubt afterward as to its validity."

Ludgrave nodded.

"I will so report to Mr. Croyden," he said.

"Very good. I will take you to Miss Croyden now."

Flinging the portières wider apart, Gruenberg, with a gesture, invited the visitor to accompany him.

Together the two men passed through a large, dark room, and thence to the hall. Here they ascended the stairs, and when the second floor was reached, Gruenberg conducted Ludgrave to a door in the rear of the house. On this he knocked, then, without waiting for a reply, he opened it.

"Miss Croyden is expecting you," he explained, as he stepped back in order that the visitor might enter.

From a chair at the farther side of the large apartment a beautiful young woman rose quickly. It was Helen Croyden, clad in the gown of rich, shimmering white silk which she had worn at Mrs. Gurney's ball.

Her brown hair was disarranged and her face was as pale as marble, but her blue eyes were clear. It was plain she had not been weeping. All the pride of perfect womanhood was in her face and bearing as she turned to Ludgrave.

"Well, what is it you have to say to me?" she asked him coldly.

CHAPTER V.

THE GRIP OF THE FALCONBUND.

CHILLED by the strange demeanor of the beautiful young woman from whom he had expected a rather different greeting, Edward Ludgrave was at a loss for an answer to her question. For several moments he regarded her in silence.

"I have come from your father, Miss Croyden," he explained at last.

The young woman glanced toward a pair of portières which hung at the forward end of the room, and in that glance Ludgrave fancied he saw a signal of warning that was designed for him.

"The report of your abduction by the Falconbund reached him less than an hour ago," the young man went on.

Again a chill stole over Ludgrave as he saw a new expression settle on Helen Croyden's face — an expression in which contempt and doubt were mingled.

"And so my father sought you out and sent you to me?" she asked as coldly as before.

Ludgrave hesitated. Was it possible that Croyden had not told his daughter of his plan to have her marry the young American? If so, dare he tell her so now?

"Yes," he answered, as a flush overspread his face. "Your father visited me at my rooms. He told me that he was in trouble, and that it was essential that you go abroad at once. He asked me to accompany you. We went together to your house. It was there we learned what had happened to you."

The cheeks and brow of Helen Croyden grew crimson, and an expression of wonder entered her eyes.

"My father asked you to go abroad—with me?" she faltered.

"Yes."

"But—" she began incredulously.

"We were to be married, Helen," he explained brokenly, as, moving quickly toward her, he attempted to take her hands.

"Stop!" commanded Helen breathlessly, as she eluded his grasp.

Ludgrave drew back.

"I do not believe you," the young woman went on more quietly. "If you have come to me from my father, what is the message that you bring?"

"He was given the privilege of coming here to-night to assure himself of your safety, but he dared not do so. I am prepared to take that assurance to him. May I tell him that you are treated kindly by those who hold you as their prisoner?"

Helen was looking at him strangely.

"Yes," she said, "you may tell him that."

"But is there no more you wish me to say to him?" Ludgrave asked.

Helen shook her head.

"No—no more," she answered calmly.

"I am told that you are being urged to marry Prince Leopold."

"Yes."

"You will not do so?"

"I will first hear what my father has to say."

"You will not consent until you see your father?"

"No."

Ludgrave held out a hand to her.

"Good night," he said.

"Good night," Helen murmured, without moving to take the extended hand. A few moments later the young man was in the hall.

Gruenberg, still masked, met him just outside the door.

The two men returned to the drawing-room in which they had met a few minutes before. When the door was closed the Hunabian turned to the visitor.

"You are satisfied that Miss Croyden is safe in the hands of the Falconbund?" he asked.

"No," replied Ludgrave shortly. "I am assured that thus far she has sustained no other injury than being abducted by a gang of foreigners who have set the laws of the United States at defiance. I will report to Mr. Croyden all that she has said to me. I will tell him also that you insist on his consent to her marriage to Leopold and a marriage settlement of fifty millions within forty-eight hours."

"Before bidding you good night," Gruenberg answered, "it may be well for me to caution you that any attempt which you may make to bring the Falconbund to an accounting will result disastrously to yourself—and others. From the moment you entered the taxicab which brought you here you have been in the grip of the Falconbund, and before the next hour has run its course you will have reason to know that that grip on you has grown tighter. There will be no hour of the day or night where the agents of the society cannot reach you. You will remember this?"

Ludgrave nodded curtly, fire flashing in his eyes.

"As you have found a way to get to this house, the Falconbund has decided to ask you to visit it again—at the same hour to-morrow night," the diplomat went on. "At two o'clock in the morning you will find a blue-light cab passing the New Theater in Central Park West. You will enter this, and bring to the Falconbund a report on the decision arrived at by Mr. Croyden.

"Twenty-four hours later the time for such a decision will have expired. It is essential that you be here to-morrow night. Meantime you will say nothing to any one other than Alan Croyden concerning the situation which confronts Mr. Croyden and his daughter. That's all."

Gruenberg opened the door and motioned to Ludgrave to precede him into the hall. Side by side they walked to the street door, which was opened by the diplomat.

"Good night," said Gruenberg.

Ludgrave made no reply. A few steps brought him to the curb, at which a taxicab was waiting. Without pausing to learn whether or not the chauffeur had received his instructions, the American entered the vehicle and closed the door. Scarcely had he done so, when the cab began to move off.

All the calmness which he had displayed before left Edward Ludgrave now. The cool, impertinent assurance of the Hunabian diplomat had roused his anger, and, disregarding the threats that had been made, he resolved to fight.

The young man's visit to the house in which Helen Croyden was detained had not been vain, but it scarcely could be regarded as satisfactory. He had learned that the house was in King's Court, near Walpole Street, and that the young woman was being treated respectfully by her abductors. In one of these abductors he had recognized Count Gruenberg.

But he would be unable to fight the Falconbund single-handed, and if his battle was not fought and won within forty-eight hours either marriage to Leopold or death might be the fate of Helen Croyden.

The young man's first impulse was to find Croyden without delay, and, after reporting to him on what he had seen and heard, devise with him some plan for the defeat of the purposes of the Falconbund. Then he suddenly recollected how Croyden had confessed that he twice had been on the point of yielding to Leopold's demands before he decided on the Jersey marriage. Would he not be far more inclined to yield to those demands in the new situation which confronted him?

And if Croyden failed him, to whom else should he turn? Where was he to look for friends?

The young man drew out his watch and struck a match. He was about to glance at the dial when the match went out. He became conscious of a numbness of feet and fingers. A feeling of weakness stole over him, and he breathed quickly, like a man recovering from a nightmare.

Drawing his coat closer about him, he leaned back in a corner of the seat.

But was it not really a nightmare, after all? Much had happened in the last few hours that seemed not only improbable, but impossible.

Where was he now? Ludgrave looked through one of the cab-windows. Before him loomed the dark columns of St. John's chapel in Varick Street. What had brought him to this section of the city if the experiences which were so fresh in his mind were no more than the incidents of a dream?

He lighted a cigar, and continued to look out through the windows of the taxicab. Again the vehicle had entered Hudson Street, and was speeding northward. Eighth Avenue was soon reached, and Greenwich Village and Chelsea were left behind. The young man had not told the chauffeur where to take him, but he did not doubt that the taxicab was headed for the Croyden house.

It was in front of the building in which his own apartments were that the cab drew up, however.

The chauffeur opened the door and Ludgrave alighted.

Without speaking, the man quickly returned to his seat, and the cab moved off. Ludgrave stolidly entered the building and stepped into the elevator, in which he ascended to the floor on which his apartments were located. There he opened his door with a latch-key.

To his surprise the young man found that the hallway and the rooms which opened into it were dark. Why had Dodson retired without leaving lights burning in the hall and sitting-room?

Ludgrave turned on an electric light in the hall, and then made his way to the sitting-room. Here he turned on another light, and then—

Lying full length on the floor, with his gray face turned upward, was Dodson, the valet!

A single glance was sufficient to convince Ludgrave that the man was dead!

CHAPTER VI.

AGAINST ODDS.

TURNING slowly, Ludgrave looked searchingly round the apartment.

All was still and no evidence of the presence of an intruder met the young man's view. Then he saw that on the floor beside the dead valet lay a narrow-bladed dagger which he had purchased more than a year before in a Constantinople bazaar, and which he since had kept on his table as a paper-knife.

The white shirt-bosom of the valet was stained with blood, and a closer examination of this showed a hole clearly made by the dagger.

Had Dodson taken his own life, or—

To Ludgrave's mind there now came a recollection of the words Gruenberg had spoken only a few moments before he and his visitor had parted:

"From the moment you entered the taxicab which brought you here you have been in the grip of the Falconbund, and before the next hour has run its course you will have reason to know that that grip on you has grown tighter."

Was the death of Dodson the evidence that was to be produced within the hour?

Ludgrave's blood ran cold.

The Falconbund had warned him to take no one other than Croyden into his confidence. Gruenberg had told him that, if he did so, he—and others—would be punished. By making a clean breast of all to the police he not only would be exposing himself to the danger of assassination, but he would place the lives of Helen and her father in peril also.

What motive did Dodson have to take his life? He had been in Ludgrave's service since the young man's return from

abroad six months before, and during this period he appeared to have been in health and free from any kind of trouble.

It seemed reasonable to suppose that the man had been murdered. Despite Gruenberg's words concerning the possibilities of the hour that was to follow his parting from Ludgrave, it was difficult for Ludgrave to believe that it was in the death of Dodson that this threat was to find its fulfilment. What object would the Falconbund have in slaying an inoffensive valet, who doubtless was in ignorance of his master's relations with Alan Croyden?

But the man was dead. The law would require some explanation of the cause and nature of his death. What was to be said —and done?

For several minutes Ludgrave nervously paced the floor. Was it part of the Falconbund's game to make him—a suitor for the hand of Helen Croyden—appear as a possible murderer? As he asked himself this question the very silence of the house appalled him.

"They are holding Helen prisoner. There is only one sane thing for me to do, and I will do it," he muttered, as, seating himself at his desk, he picked up the telephone-receiver.

He directed the operator to give him police headquarters. In a few moments the detective bureau was at the other end of the wire. The man who first responded called some one else, and it was to him that Ludgrave told the story of the manner he had entered his apartments and had found the body of the valet on the floor.

"I'll send a man right up to you," the other said at last. "Meantime keep to your room, and do not allow any one else to enter the place. Don't phone to anybody else about it. We will notify the coroner. If you speak to any one else about it the story will get into the newspapers, and reporters will be hampering us in our work. See our man first, and do your talking afterward."

As the young man sank back in his chair and hid his face in his hands, it suddenly occurred to him that a motive for the murder of Dodson was apparent. Gruenberg had said that there would not be an hour of the day or night that would find Ludgrave beyond the reach of the Falconbund. Was it not probable that Dodson had been slain because it was feared that he might prove too faithful to his master?

But how had the murderer obtained access to the apartments? These were on the fourth floor of the building, and a person desiring to reach them would have to pass through the entrance-hall on the first floor and either ascend by the elevator or walk up the stairs. In this case it was more than probable that he had been seen by either the elevator-boy or one of the clerks or servants.

Then, suddenly, there entered Ludgrave's mind a recollection of the fact that when he had gone out with Croyden he had left Fenwood in his room. Fenwood had been eavesdropping. Why?

Breathing more quickly, the young man rose and, realizing that he still wore Croyden's overcoat, he proceeded to remove it.

As he did so, he observed that his watch was out of its pocket and was dangling at the end of its chain. This impressed him as singular, and, as he slipped it into his pocket, he tried to remember the circumstances under which he had last drawn out the timepiece.

He recollected it had been in the taxicab, just before St. John's Church, in Varick Street, was reached on his homeward journey. He recalled striking a match at that time, but he was unable to remember what time it had been.

Again the young man's thoughts reverted to Fenwood. In the new light which he brought to bear on the Englishman many incidents which had seemed unimportant began to assume startling significance.

Fenwood had sought his company on nearly every possible occasion, and from time to time had manifested a tendency to speak with more or less intimacy on Ludgrave's affairs. He had seemed to be especially interested in Ludgrave's visits to Miss Croyden.

As it became more and more clear to the American that Fenwood was a spy, the conviction grew stronger that the Englishman had a hand in the murder of poor Dodson, whom he doubtless had found too faithful to his master's interests to serve the purposes of the Falconbund.

Within ten minutes of the time Ludgrave called up police headquarters his hall-bell rang. The young man rose apprehensively. He knew that it would take at least twenty minutes for a man to cover the distance between police headquarters and his apartments. He went to the door, however, and, upon opening it, he saw that

his visitor was a swarthy man of middle age and medium height, with a clean-shaven face, and an expression of grim resolution.

"Mr. Ludgrave?" he asked.

Ludgrave replied in the affirmative.

"I'm from headquarters," the other explained shortly.

Ludgrave looked at him incredulously.

"Come in, then," he said.

When the visitor entered, Ludgrave closed and locked the door.

"You made the journey quickly," the young man remarked.

"I got my instructions by telephone. I was only a few blocks from here when the inspector called me up. Am I the first person you have seen since you found the body?"

"Yes."

The detective nodded approvingly.

"That's well," he said. "My name is Boyd. Now let me see the body, please."

After the body had been viewed by the visitor, the two men seated themselves, and Ludgrave told his story. He held back nothing — neither his acquaintance with Helen Croyden and with Fenwood, his meeting with Fenwood at the club and all that had followed his arrival at his house, his conversations with Croyden, his visit to the house in which Helen was detained—nor any incident that had occurred up to the time he had called up police headquarters.

Boyd listened stolidly, now and then interrupting the narrative to ask a question. Most of these questions had to do with Ludgrave's experience while in the blue-light taxicab, and in the house in which he had talked with Helen Croyden.

When Ludgrave's story was finished, the detective rose. For several moments he thoughtfully paced the floor. At length he halted in front of Ludgrave and gazed at him with a curious, searching expression.

"Well, Mr. Ludgrave, we are confronted with certain extraordinary conditions, and these we must meet in an extraordinary way," he said. "It must not be known that we suspect the Falconbund of being responsible for this murder. We must conceal the fact that your valet was murdered at all. In order to do this, it will be best to refrain from letting any one know that he is dead."

Ludgrave regarded the detective with open-mouthed astonishment.

"It can and must be done," Boyd said grimly.

"But—" the young man began.

"All that will be required of you is silence," the detective went on. "You may safely leave the rest to me. You have been considerable of a traveler, I understand, so it is more than probable that you have a large trunk about here somewhere."

"You purpose taking the body away in a trunk—without notifying the coroner?" the young man demanded.

"Yes. We will see to it, of course, that the body of the man has decent burial, and, in course of time, his relatives will be duly notified."

Ludgrave's distrust of his visitor was momentarily increasing.

"But what is the real motive for all this secrecy?" he asked.

"It should be plain enough, I think. If the story of this murder is reported to the coroner, the newspapers will have it a few hours afterward. Naturally, they will try to learn on what lines we are working in our attempts to solve the mystery and arrest the murderer.

"Fenwood must not know for the present that he is suspected, for it is probable that before we are through with him we may be able to get him to lead us to the Falconbundists under whom he is working. Thus far, he and Gruenberg are the only ones we will be able to shadow. Through them we will try to discover the location of the house in which Miss Croyden is concealed."

"But I have told you that it is in King's Court, near Walpole Street," protested Ludgrave. "From the corner of Walpole Street and King's Court I can point it out to you."

Boyd shook his head. For the first time since he had entered the apartment his grim features relaxed, and he smiled faintly.

"No," he said. "The Falconbundists are wiser than you know. They only can lead us to the house we seek. In the city of New York there are no streets which bear the names you have mentioned."

From one of the pockets of his coat the detective drew out a little book bound in black leather.

"This is a New York street directory," he explained, as he passed it to Ludgrave. "It contains the names of the streets of the five boroughs. Examine it and see if you can find Walpole Street and King's Court."

The young man took the book, and for several moments he searched its pages. He failed to find the names he sought.

"They are not there," he said, as he

returned the directory to the detective. "There is no doubt, however, that they are within a minute's ride of St. John's Chapel."

Again Boyd shook his head.

"No," he said, "they are not there."

CHAPTER VII.

A CHANGE OF FRONT.

LUDGRAVE frowned and an expression of incredulity again settled on his face.

"Am I to understand that you do not believe what I have told you?" he demanded of the detective. "Do you doubt that I met Miss Croyden in the house which I have described?"

"No," Boyd answered thoughtfully. "I am giving full credence to all that you have told me, but it is clear to me that it will be as impossible for you to find that house again as it has been for you to find the names of the streets in this directory.

"The section in which St. John's is located is well known to me. I am convinced that in it are no streets bearing the names you have mentioned, and also that there is none which corresponds to the description you have given."

"But I tell you—"

"Your descriptions of your rides to and from St. John's Chapel in Varick Street are faithful enough, but, beyond that point there is something lacking. You appear to have carefully observed every turn made by the taxi until the cab stopped in front of St. John's, where the chauffeur alighted to tinker with the mechanism of the vehicle. Now how do you account for your haziness so far as the movements of the cab between St. John's and Walpole Street were concerned?"

"Well, the streets were darker — perhaps," Ludgrave muttered thoughtfully.

"You remember leaving Walpole Street?"

"Why, yes—in a general way."

"And it was while you were leaving Walpole Street, on your return trip, that you took out your watch?"

"Yes."

"But you cannot remember what time it was that you lighted that match and started to look at the dial."

The young man shook his head negatively.

"The next you remember is your approach to St. John's in Varick Street?" asked the detective.

"Yes."

Boyd nodded.

"You see, then, that, both going and coming, the only part of your journey that found your powers of observation at fault was that which lay between St. John's and Walpole Street. This was the most important of all. How do you account for your failure to observe the turns made by the cab at those times?"

"I have made no attempt to account for it," Ludgrave muttered with a frown. "On the way down it seemed to me that St. John's was scarcely behind me when the taxi entered Walpole Street. Returning, it had reached St. John's while I still had it in mind to look at the watch I had taken from my pocket while the cab was passing out of Walpole Street."

With a little shrug, Boyd began to pace the floor again. A minute later he halted in front of his host.

"You will keep your appointment with the Falconbund to-night?" he asked abruptly.

Ludgrave stiffened suddenly, and an expression of apprehension settled on his features.

"If it is necessary—yes," he answered after a pause.

"In that way, you see, I shall have opportunity to follow a blue-light taxicab," the detective went on. "An opportunity that should not be neglected."

The young man nodded.

"I will keep the appointment," he said.

"I thought you would," murmured the detective approvingly. "And now we come to the subject of the removal of the body of your valet. I suggest that from this point you proceed as you would have done had you not found your valet dead on your return. It was your plan to see Mr. Croyden as soon as possible, was it not?"

"Yes."

"Go to him now. There is little doubt that he is still at his home. It is best that he should be informed of your interview with this fellow Gruenberg, and of the demands of the Falconbund."

"I am to leave you here?"

"Yes—after indicating to me a large trunk that you are prepared to spare. When you go down you may tell the elevator-man that I am a friend who will pass the night in

these apartments. You might also leave instructions to have a man admitted for the purpose of taking away a trunk. Return here, if possible, by noon. You will find no sign of the tragedy or of me.

"I shall communicate with you later in the day. In the meantime keep from Mr. Croyden and all others all knowledge of the death of your valet. Act as you would have done had Dodson not been killed—as you would have done had I not been called into the case."

Though Ludgrave was not altogether satisfied with Boyd's explanation of his motive for keeping secret the death of Dodson, he decided to act on the advice of the detective. Having reported the matter to the police, he felt that his responsibility in connection with the murder was at an end.

A trunk that answered the detective's requirements soon was placed at his disposal, and the young man again put on Croyden's hat and overcoat and left the apartments.

In the elevator Ludgrave asked the night elevator-man what time Fenwood had left the building. He was informed that the Englishman went out about half an hour after his own departure. This information was significant. Why had Fenwood remained behind so long?

Questioned further, the man said that no person, during Ludgrave's absence, had gone to his apartments by way of the elevator. The evidence that the Englishman was a murderer, as well as a spy, now seemed conclusive.

After informing the elevator attendant that an expressman would call at an early hour for a trunk, Ludgrave left the building. At the Croyden residence the door was opened by Wilken, the butler.

"Is Mr. Croyden in?" the young man asked.

An expression of relief settled on the butler's face as he replied:

"Yes, sir. He is where you left him, sir—in the library."

The millionaire was still seated at the desk. His face was waxen, and his bloodshot eyes were staring at the floor. His features wore an expression of grim despair. As Ludgrave approached, Croyden looked up quickly.

"You have seen her?" he asked shortly.

So perfunctorily were the words spoken that the young man was taken aback. Until then he did not know what the millionaire had suspected that he had gone to meet the Falconbund. How had he come by the knowledge?

"Yes," the young man answered quietly.

"She is safe, then?"

"Yes."

Croyden surveyed the young man moodily. His eyes were interrogative, but his lips were silent.

Ludgrave sank into a chair, and, loosening his overcoat, he began his story without further encouragement. He described his adventures faithfully until he came to an account of his arrival at his rooms. Of the death of Dodson and of the visit of Boyd he said nothing. When he was done Croyden nodded wearily.

"Thanks, Ned," he said. He paused, then added: "Let us go at once. Your coat is on the chair on which you left it. Let me have mine."

"Where do you purpose going?" Ludgrave asked wonderingly.

"To King's Court," the elder man replied as he rose unsteadily.

"But—" the visitor began.

"To King's Court—to the house in which they are detaining my daughter," Croyden said determinedly. "Since you have been there, you will know the way. Come—come, there is no time to waste. We must go at once. Give me that coat."

"What do you intend to do at the house of which you speak?" he asked.

"I will give the fellows the answer they require."

As Ludgrave rose slowly his face was expressive of astonishment and dismay.

"You do not mean that you will accede to their terms?" he asked breathlessly.

"Yes," said the old man in a hollow voice.

"You will give your daughter to that Hunabian scoundrel?"

"Since it is necessary to do so in order to save her from a worse fate—yes."

"No fate could be worse than that?"

"Yes," said Croyden, with a note of anger in his tone. "In his effort to win his rightful position in Hunabia the young man has grown desperate. Success may make him honorable again. He will win, and I will help him. Helen will be a queen, and, as such, all men and women in this world will honor her. I am old. My life's work is nearly done. All that I have is Helen's. I will make her happy."

"Great Heavens—are you mad?" Ludgrave gasped.

"No. I have been thinking. That is all."

Trembling with agitation, Ludgrave took off the coat he had been wearing, and then he drew on his own. It was not until Croyden was almost ready for the street that the young man broke the silence that had fallen upon them.

"It will be useless to attempt to communicate with the Falconbund before the appearance of the blue-light cab to-night," he said.

Croyden frowned.

"They will not refuse to admit me to the house, I think," he retorted. "Since I go prepared to accede to their terms, I will have nothing to fear at their hands."

"It will be impossible for me to take you to the house," the young man answered.

"You mean that you refuse to accompany me?"

"I mean that since I left the house which I described to you I have learned that, in some manner, I was tricked — that in the neighborhood of Varick Street are no streets bearing the names of Walpole and King's Court—no streets answering their description."

The face of Croyden grew livid.

"Then, you have lied to me!" he exclaimed in a shaking voice.

"But, sir—" the young man began.

"Stop!" Croyden commanded angrily. "I'll hear no more. The motive of your refusal is plain. Realizing that it is impossible for Helen to become your wife, you decline to aid her further. So go. For what you have done I thank you. Go."

Again Ludgrave tried to protest, but the words died on his lips. Alan Croyden, accustomed to have men do his bidding, plainly was in no mood for argument now. Dominated by fears for his daughter's safety, as well as by a recognition of his own peril, he had decided on the course he was to pursue, and his resolution was not to be shaken.

For several moments Ludgrave was tempted to tell of his meeting with Boyd, and what the detective had told him concerning the mysterious streets. He decided, however, that such a revelation would be unwise.

"Will you leave this house first, or shall I?" Croyden demanded angrily, as his visitor hesitated.

"I will go," replied Ludgrave quietly.

Then, without further delay, he left the house and entered the taxicab which awaited him at the door. Glancing at his watch, he saw it was a quarter of six. The idea of returning to his own rooms while Boyd and the body of Dodson were there inspired him with dread. The detective had assured him that his presence there was not necessary until after his departure, so the young man directed the chauffeur to take him to the Grand Central Station.

Upon arriving at the railway station, Ludgrave looked over a suburban timetable, and, finding that a train would leave for Stamford in a few minutes, he boarded it. He wanted time for reflection, and he felt that he could think more clearly were the city and its horror behind him. If he took breakfast at his club his haggardness would excite remark, and he would have been able to while away scarcely more than an hour in a public restaurant. The ride to Stamford would occupy an hour, and upon his arrival there he would walk to a roadhouse he had visited before and there eat his morning meal. This done, he would return to the station and take a train that would land him in New York a little before noon. In the city he would feel that he was under surveillance; out of it he could breathe more freely.

Scarcely had the train left the station, however, when he began to regret the course he had taken. It now occurred to him that he had erred in not making a more determined effort to persuade Croyden to relinquish his idea of seeking the Falconbund. Would the millionaire go to Varick Street, and from there attempt to find his way to the streets which Ludgrave had visited a few hours before?

Gradually the young man's distrust of Boyd grew more keen, and he began to reproach himself for agreeing to the secret removal of Dodson's body. He even went so far as to doubt that Boyd did, indeed, come to him from police headquarters.

His breath came more quickly as he saw the manner in which his perils were multiplying, and for the first time since he had learned of the abduction of Helen Croyden a feeling of desperation stole over him.

When, half an hour out of the Grand Central, the train stopped at Mount Vernon, Ludgrave decided that he would go no farther. Accordingly he alighted, and in a couple of minutes he was mingling with the crowd of commuters who were awaiting the arrival of a city-bound train.

And now he made a discovery that disquieted him.

Among the commuters he saw a face that he had seen only a few minutes before on the train on which he had come from New York — a long, somewhat florid, face, in which were set a pair of greenish eyes. The man had been seated in one of the rear seats of the smoking-car when Ludgrave had seen him first, but there was nothing in his appearance that then had excited Ludgrave's distrust. The stranger was about thirty years of age, with reddish hair, and he wore a dark hat and overcoat.

Their glances had met only for a moment, then the florid-faced man had turned carelessly toward the window beside him. Ludgrave, however, had observed the color of his eyes, for they had resembled those of an old classmate; but the impression was only momentary, and would have been forgotten had the stranger not appeared on the Mount Vernon platform so soon afterward.

Like Ludgrave, the stranger had found some reason for a sudden change of destination; like Ludgrave, he apparently was waiting to board a train for New York.

It now was only a few minutes after seven o'clock, and Ludgrave knew that until nine o'clock there would be only short intervals between city-bound trains.

The task of learning whether or not the man was indeed keeping him under surveillance would be a simple one.

CHAPTER VIII.

FRIEND OR ENEMY?

LEAVING the platform of the station, Ludgrave ascended a flight of steps leading to a bridge that spanned the railway tracks. It was not until this was crossed that he glanced over his shoulder. The stranger had disappeared.

Walking more rapidly, the young man continued on until he came to the main street of the town.

As he entered this, he again looked behind him. He now saw that the florid-faced man was crossing the bridge. At the first street-crossing Ludgrave turned the corner and quickly stepped into a doorway. He had not long to wait. Scarcely two minutes passed before the man he was expecting appeared.

As the glances of the two men met, the eyes of Ludgrave flashed angrily. The stranger appeared to be indifferent, and, shifting his gaze to the street, walked on, puffing stolidly at his cigar. A few yards farther on he, too, stepped into a doorway.

Ludgrave's nerves were tingling with anger and loathing. It was his second experience with a spy, and, though he had never been known as a fighting man, the fighting spirit was beginning to dominate him now. That the fellow was following him was clear.

A few steps took Ludgrave to where the other was standing. The stranger regarded him curiously as he approached.

"Is there anything you want of me?" Ludgrave demanded.

Removing the cigar from his mouth, the the stranger looked thoughtfully at the ash.

"Why—I guess not," he replied, after a pause.

"You are not quite sure?" Ludgrave asked.

The stranger looked at him sharply.

"Not quite—just yet," he said.

"How long will it take you to make up your mind?"

The stranger glanced over his shoulder at the closed door in front of which he was standing. The two men were at the entrance to a confectioner's shop.

"I scarcely know, Mr. Ludgrave," the stranger answered easily. "I am afraid that will depend to some extent on the length of time you are spending away from Manhattan. Sooner or later it may be necessary for me to remind you that you have an appointment at noon."

Ludgrave was unable to keep his features from assuming a startled expression.

"You mean—" he began.

"With Boyd."

"You are a friend of Boyd's?"

"Yes. And it is because I am working in Boyd's interest—and yours—that I will ask you to make my task of following you as easy as possible. It might be unfortunate for both of us if we were to be found talking together here."

"But why should you be following me at all?" Ludgrave demanded wonderingly.

"It might be well for me to get a line on some one else who may be following you."

Ludgrave frowned.

"I see," he said.

"What did Croyden say?" the stranger asked.

"I'll tell Boyd when I see him — perhaps," Ludgrave answered shortly.

"Perhaps, eh!" the stranger muttered; then, after a pause, he added: "Well, there

seems to be nothing more to say just now. I'd advise you, though, to get back to your rooms as soon as possible. If you see anybody following you, don't try to shake him off. It will do you no harm to have one or two of our men on your trail. That's all, I guess. You'd better lead the way from here."

As Ludgrave turned back toward the station he was at a loss to know whether to regard the interview with satisfaction or alarm. Already he had viewed Boyd with suspicion, and this stranger had introduced himself as a friend of Boyd's.

The return to New York was without incident. Ludgrave arrived in the city a few minutes before nine o'clock, and had breakfast in a restaurant near the station. When this was finished he entered a taxicab and directed the chauffeur to take him to his apartments. As the cab moved off, he looked through the rear window. Several other vehicles were following, but he was unable to tell whether one of them was occupied by the stranger he had met in Mount Vernon.

It was with a sinking heart that the young man entered the building in which his apartments were situated. The elevator-man on duty was not the one to whom Ludgrave had spoken when he had left, but he asked him whether an expressman had called for his trunk. The man replied that the trunk had been taken away before eight o'clock. He also explained that Ludgrave's "friend" had left shortly afterward.

"And I guess your man's out, too, sir, for there weren't no one to open the door when the laundry come," he added.

Ludgrave shuddered as he turned the key in the lock. Within all was still. He halted at the threshold of the room in which he had found the body of the valet a few hours before. The body was gone, and as he glanced at the floor he saw that there had been a rearrangement of the rugs. The one on which Dodson had fallen was removed. In the room there remained no trace of the tragedy.

There were five rooms in the suite—a sitting-room, bedroom, breakfast-room, valet's room, and bath-room—and through these Ludgrave wandered half curiously. Everything except the trunk and blood-stained rug appeared to be in its accustomed place. Just inside the bedroom door, however, he saw some ashes on the floor. Stooping, he looked at them carefully. Mingling with these was some pipe-tobacco. He knew he had not dropped it there, and Boyd had been smoking a cigar. Apparently, Fenwood had let his pipe fall while he had been eavesdropping at the door.

Ludgrave sank onto a couch and hid his face in one of the cushions. More than thirty hours had passed since he had slept, and the nervous strain to which he had been subjected now began to tell upon him. At length he fell into a doze, and in a few minutes was sleeping heavily.

He was awakened by the ringing of his bell, and he rose with a start. For several moments he was unable to collect his thoughts, and the incidents of the night and morning seemed like those of a dream. As he glanced at a clock he saw that it was half past twelve. The ringing of the bell ceased; then it began again.

Ludgrave hurried to the hall door. He doubted not that the visitor was Boyd, but his heart was beating rapidly and he was a prey to a violent feeling of apprehension. There was no denying the fact that the fear of the Falconbund was upon him, and added to this was a dread that, in some manner or other, he would be held accountable for the disappearance of Dodson.

Ludgrave's hand trembled as he opened the door, but a feeling of relief passed over him as he saw that the visitor was a messenger-boy, who gave him a square envelope. Tearing open the envelope, he drew out a sheet of paper and read:

DEAR SIR:

I find that it is impracticable for me to keep the appointment which I made with you for noon to-day, and I probably shall be unable to see you before to-morrow. It is most essential, however, that you meet to-night the persons you agreed to meet, for failure to do so undoubtedly will involve you in serious difficulty. So far as the other matter is concerned, all goes well.

B.

For several moments Ludgrave, pacing the floor of the sitting-room, asked himself what it was best for him to do. He resolved that he would make another attempt to see Croyden for the purpose of protesting against the action which the old man had in mind. But first it was essential that he know how far Boyd was to be trusted. He must satisfy himself that Boyd was what he represented himself to be—a member of the regular detective force.

Putting on his overcoat and hat, Ludgrave again left his apartments. It was now

a few minutes before one, and he told the elevator man that he would not be back before five.

"My man will not be here to-day," he explained.

A few minutes later he was headed for police headquarters. In less than half an hour he was at his destination. Here he asked to be directed to the detective bureau, and was referred to a man in uniform who sat outside the door of the inspector's room.

"Well, sir?" demanded the policeman grumpily.

"I would like to see Detective Boyd," said Ludgrave.

The policeman looked at him dully, then he shook his head.

"There ain't no detective of that name in the central office," he replied.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PRICE OF FAILURE.

LUDGRAVE'S heart sank; his vision was blurred, and he breathed more quickly.

"You are sure?" he persisted.

"Sure?" the policeman repeated, with a frown. "Of course I'm sure. What would I be stringin' you for?"

"Last night I called up this office and asked to have a man sent to me," Ludgrave explained. "Shortly afterward a man who said his name was Boyd called on me and informed me that he had come from here."

"What was the case?"

Ludgrave hesitated. Dared he tell?

"Here is my card," he said.

The policeman glanced at the card, looked at Ludgrave sharply, then rose and entered the adjoining room. He soon was out again.

"The inspector wants to see you," he said. "Go right in."

As Ludgrave entered the room he saw, seated at a desk, a tall, broad-shouldered, soldierly-looking man with dark-gray hair and mustache.

"Mr. Ludgrave?" he asked curtly.

"Yes."

"Sit down," said the inspector, pointing to a chair near his desk.

Ludgrave seated himself and looked uncertainly at the man before him.

"Well, what is it, Mr. Ludgrave?" the inspector asked almost surlily.

"I came here to see a man named Boyd, who gave me to understand that he was connected with the central office," the visitor explained.

"There is no one of that name on our rolls." There was a pause, then the inspector inquired: "Is that all?"

Again Ludgrave hesitated. The eyes of the inspector were following the movements of a pencil with which he was making a crude outline of a human head on a pad that lay on his desk.

"The man of whom I speak appeared in response to a message which I sent to this office at an early hour this morning," the visitor explained.

"What were the circumstances?" the inspector asked.

"When I returned to my rooms a little after three o'clock this morning, I found my valet — a man named Dodson — lying dead on the floor of my sitting-room. He had been murdered."

The inspector, still watching the moving pencil, remained silent, while Ludgrave told his story. He appeared to find little interest in the words of his visitor. Ludgrave watched him with rapidly increasing wonder.

"Sometimes our men find it desirable to assume names other than their own when they are on certain kinds of cases," he said. "What sort of looking man was the one you saw?"

Ludgrave described him. The inspector, leaning forward, again began to pencil lines on the pad.

"Well, Mr. Ludgrave, I'll look the matter up," he said indifferently. "Some time this evening, perhaps, I'll communicate with you by telephone. But what was your purpose in coming down here to-day to see this man who told you his name was Boyd?"

"I wanted to assure myself that he was all he represented himself to be."

For the first time since Ludgrave had entered the room, the inspector met his gaze fairly.

"What reason have you for doubting that the man was all he represented himself to be?" he demanded.

"Well, some of his proceedings struck me as being a little irregular. The fact that he is not known here—at least by the name of Boyd—is not altogether reassuring."

The gaze of the inspector shifted to the pad again. For several moments he was silent, then he said:

"You have described a man who is not

unknown to me, but he is not connected in any way with the police department of this city. I think, however, you are perfectly safe in giving him your confidence — indeed, I would most strongly advise you to yield entirely to his guidance. Follow his instructions implicitly. If he tells you to maintain secrecy concerning this affair, do not speak of it to others—not even to me."

"You vouch for him, then?"

A dark flush overspread the inspector's face.

"I will vouch for the work of no man who is not connected with this department," he retorted.

"Is your department going to ignore the fact that my valet has been murdered?"

"No," replied the inspector, flashing a dark, disapproving glance on his visitor. "But, like you, this department will find it advisable to make no great stir about the matter at present."

Ludgrave rose.

"Then I am to understand that my responsibility is ended so far as the reporting of the murder of my valet to the proper authorities is concerned?" he asked.

"For the present—yes," answered the inspector.

Ludgrave left police headquarters scarcely less bewildered than when he had entered the building. The inspector's lack of curiosity concerning the details of the murder indicated that already he was informed of them.

Ludgrave was in the act of stepping into the taxicab which had brought him to police headquarters, when the chauffeur, observing his abstraction, asked:

"What address, sir?"

The young man hesitated.

"St. John's Chapel, in Varick Street," he directed grimly.

In less than ten minutes he was there. Having dismissed the chauffeur, he looked at his watch. It was a quarter after two. He then addressed himself to a search for the streets to which he had been taken by the blue-light cab twelve hours before.

Upon leaving his apartments Ludgrave had told the elevator man that he would be back about five. It was not until several minutes past this hour that he relinquished his search for the lost streets. Every effort he had made to find them had been vain. He had traversed every street which lay in the big triangle formed by Canal Street, Broadway, and the North River.

At the corner of Canal Street and Broadway he hailed a taxicab and directed the chauffeur to take him to the Croyden residence. Arriving there he alighted and rang the bell. Wilken, the butler, admitted him to the house.

"Has Mr. Croyden returned?" Ludgrave asked.

"No, sir," replied the butler, whose face wore an anxious expression. "He left only a few moments after you did, sir, and we have not seen or heard from him since."

The young man shook his head gravely.

"I cannot wait," he said, "so I will ask you to telephone to me at my apartments as soon as Mr. Croyden arrives. You may tell him that I called, but it may be well, perhaps, for you to refrain from telling him that you will report his arrival to me."

"Very good, sir," replied the butler. Then, after a pause, the man added: "And I hope, sir, that—well, that Miss Croyden's being away has nothing to do with the trouble, sir."

The butler's curiosity concerning the absence of his young mistress was plain enough, but on that subject Ludgrave had nothing to say.

"I hope not, Wilken," he answered shortly, and turned away.

As the young man removed his overcoat and hat in his apartment, his sensations were those of a wild animal which, recently captured, had spent the first day of captivity in vain efforts to escape from a cage. Since his visit to the house in which Helen Croyden was held by the Falconbund unseen forces seemed to restrain every effort he had made to effect the young woman's release.

In the matter of the death of Dodson he also had found himself vainly beating against the bars. The mysterious Boyd, after pledging him to secrecy, had smuggled the body of the murdered valet from the house, and the inspector had advised him to yield to Boyd's guidance.

There now seemed to be only two things for him to do. He would see Croyden and attempt to persuade him to withhold, for a time, at least, his consent to Helen's marriage to Leopold. Failing in this, he would go to the King's Court house at the appointed hour and report the millionaire's decision to the Falconbund.

As he sank again on his couch he was overcome by a sense of loneliness, which gradually merged into one of apprehension.

While he had been in action, he had felt no fear, but now he was conscious of the fact that his nerves were shaken. He must not be caught off his guard, as Dodson had been.

Rising quickly, he went to a steamer trunk, and, opening this, he took out a revolver and slipped it into one of the pockets of his coat. This done, he rang for a bell-boy and directed him to have a waiter from the restaurant below serve dinner in his room.

When the meal was finished, it was eight o'clock. The feeling of isolation had left him now, but his failure to hear from Wilken inspired him with anxiety. Had Alan Croyden succeeded in getting in communication with the Falconbund? Had he met with a misadventure? Or was Helen's marriage contract with Leopold of Towardein already signed?

At nine o'clock, unable to stand the strain of uncertainty longer, he called up the Croyden house on the telephone. Wilken responded.

"Has Mr. Croyden returned yet?" Ludgrave asked.

"No, sir," the butler said.

"And you have heard nothing from him?"

"Nothing, sir."

"You will call me up as soon as he returns?" Ludgrave asked. "I will spend the evening in my rooms."

"I will not fail, sir."

Hour after hour passed, but from the hall and telephone bells there came no sound. At midnight he got into communication with Wilken again. Croyden had not returned.

With bloodshot eyes, haggard face, and nervous steps, Ludgrave continued to pace the floor. Stronger and stronger in his mind grew the conviction that Croyden himself was a prisoner of the Falconbund.

At half-past one, leaving the lights in his apartments burning, he went out to seek the blue-light cab.

The time for him to act had come at last, and the knowledge nerved him. That he was about to expose himself to grave personal peril, he did not doubt. Boyd would follow him, he knew, and in the course of the long hours he had spent alone, his confidence in this strange man had grown stronger. He failed to understand, however, why, if they were to work together, Boyd had not been more communicative.

Puffing at a cigar, Ludgrave made his way to the New Theater on foot. As he walked, he glanced over his shoulder from time to time, and each time he did so he observed dark figures following him at a distance. Shortly before he reached his destination the figures vanished. As he halted in front of the theater the only person who met his view was a policeman who, passing him twice, looked at him carelessly, then finally disappeared around a corner.

For ten minutes Ludgrave abstractedly watched the vehicles that passed him. At two o'clock his interest in them became intensified. It was a couple of minutes after the hour when, with a leaping heart, he saw a blue light flow dully between two yellow ones that were borne by an approaching vehicle. As this drew up at the curb, he saw that it was a taxicab.

"Cab, sir?" the chauffeur asked.

Ludgrave saw that the man was the same who had taken him to King's Court on the night before.

"Yes," he answered.

"What address?" the man inquired.

"The same to which you took me last night—King's Court."

The chauffeur alighted quickly and opened the door. Ludgrave entered the vehicle, and, as he did so, his hand slipped into one of the pockets of his overcoat. His fingers closed over the metal of a revolver.

The young man resolved that on this occasion he would not be caught napping as Walpole Street was approached. Since his interview with Boyd he had spent much time speculating on the manner in which he had been duped so far as the location of the mysterious streets was concerned.

That he had been rendered unconscious, either by the administration of drugs or by some other agency, he did not doubt. How else could he account for the sudden failure of his powers of observation, for his lapse of memory and the dangling watch?

As on the former occasion, the cab moved swiftly southward along Eighth Avenue. When Chelsea and Greenwich Village were passed and the cab entered Hudson Street, Ludgrave took out his watch, and by the light of a match which he struck, he looked at the dial. It was twenty minutes after two. He returned the watch to his pocket.

"Last night we turned off Hudson into Laight Street," he mused. "When we reach Laight Street to-night—"

He shivered and his heart began to flutter

as it had done on the preceding night. The cab was turning a corner. Ludgrave glanced out of one of the windows and a street sign on a lamp-post held his gaze. He read:

Walpole Street.

Again he was conscious of a numbness of his feet and hands, and slight tremors passed through his limbs. He gasped for breath.

In a couple of minutes he would be in the presence of Gruenberg or some other member of the Falconbund. Was his courage ebbing?

He knew he had been unconscious, and that incident to this he had sustained some sort of a nervous shock. He was unstrung and would need time in which to brace himself for the ordeal which he now was about to face.

These were his thoughts as the cab halted in front of the house he had visited on the night before. In another moment the chauffeur had opened the door next to the sidewalk.

"Here we are, sir," said the man.

Ludgrave alighted slowly. It was in his mind to pause at the foot of the steps and, while trying to steady himself, make a careful survey of the neighboring houses in order that he might describe them afterward. In a moment, however, he realized that his action would be observed and understood by those who had him at their mercy.

The young man ascended the steps deliberately and rang the bell. His finger had scarcely left the button when the door was opened noiselessly. The hall was dark, but a faint light indicated the position of the door of the drawing-room.

"You know the way," a voice said gruffly.

A few moments later Ludgrave was in the apartment in which he had been received by Gruenberg. The door through which he entered was closed behind him, and almost immediately afterward the portières parted, and there appeared a figure wearing a black mask, black domino, and a square-cut cap, with flaps that concealed hair and ears.

"This way," the masker said.

Again Ludgrave recognized the voice of Grüenberg.

The room from which the diplomat had just emerged had been dark when Ludgrave had been conducted through it on the night before, but as Gruenberg now drew the portières farther aside the visitor saw that it was faintly lighted and contained the furniture of an old-fashioned dining-room.

In an armchair near the table was seated the figure of an unmasked man, with bowed head.

As Ludgrave glanced at him first he thought the man was sleeping.

A moment later, however, the visitor drew back sharply, and there was a sudden rush of blood to his head and eyes.

"In Heaven's name, what's this?" Ludgrave gasped.

"It is the price of failure," said Gruenberg solemnly.

The man was Boyd—with the drab hue of death on face and hands!

CHAPTER X.

A TELLTALE SPHINX.

FOR several moments the silence of the apartment was unbroken.

"You were duly warned," said Gruenberg. "By communicating with the police you have laid the death of this man at your door. Your own life has been forfeited as well, but whether or not it will be taken by the Falconbund depends on the message you bring from Alan Croyden."

"Has Mr. Croyden not already communicated with you?" Ludgrave asked unsteadily.

"No. It is through you that the Falconbund expects an answer to its demands."

Ludgrave hesitated. If Croydon had not been in communication with the Falconbund, was it not possible that he still had some hope of defying it successfully? His failure to return to his house indicated one of two things.

Either he had been held as prisoner by the Falconbund, or, having shaken off its spies, he was somewhere in concealment waiting for an opportunity to strike at it.

The young man saw that his safest course lay in equivocation. Despite the shock he had sustained, he proceeded boldly.

"I reported to Mr. Croyden, before day-

break, all that occurred during my visit to you last night," he explained. "He was too much upset at the time, however, to consider the matter calmly. I was to call later in the day for his answer. He left his house at an early hour, and has not since returned to it."

"And you do not know where he designed to go?"

"No."

"You have no knowledge of where he is at the present time?"

"None."

"Then you have no report to make to the Falconbund?"

"I am unable to tell you what is the nature of the decision at which Mr. Croyden has arrived, though I have used my best efforts to learn it."

"Meantime you have taken the police into your confidence."

"The murder of my valet and the presence of the dead body in my rooms made it necessary to notify the police of that fact, and I did so."

The sudden start that Gruenberg gave was observed by the visitor.

"Your valet was murdered!" the count exclaimed in a low voice.

"When I returned to my apartments after leaving you I found the body of my man, Dodson, on the floor. Who killed him I do not know. It was a matter for the police, however, and to the police I reported it. Boyd was out, and no one else could give me the information I sought."

Ludgrave gave a little start as a voice behind him asked:

"And you told the police nothing about your experience with the Falconbund?"

Turning quickly, Ludgrave found himself confronted by a tall figure which wore a gray mask and domino. The young man quickly reflected that he had told the story only to Boyd, and that the inspector had informed him that Boyd was not a member of the police department.

"No," he answered. "I did not speak of the Falconbund to the police."

There was a pause that was broken by the man in gray.

"How did it happen, then, that this man Boyd was following our blue-light taxicab to-night?" he asked.

Ludgrave shook his head.

"I do not know—unless—"

He stopped.

"Unless—" the man in gray persisted.

"Unless he thought he had some reason to lay the crime of murder to my charge," Ludgrave finished.

There was another pause.

"You think it possible that he suspected you of killing your valet?" the gray man asked.

"It is possible—of course," Ludgrave answered thoughtfully.

"Did you?" put in Gruenberg.

The color faded from Ludgrave's face.

"No," he answered sharply.

"Is there any one whom you suspect?" the gray man questioned.

"The only person, other than Dodson, who appears to have been in my apartments after I left them was an Englishman who has rather forced himself upon me in the last six months."

"You mean—" Gruenberg queried.

Ludgrave was silent.

"Fenwood?" asked the man in gray.

"Yes," Ludgrave answered grimly.

"What could be the Englishman's motive for committing such an act?" inquired Gruenberg.

Ludgrave shrugged his shoulders.

"I do not know," he said.

From the other side of the portières came the sound of a low voice. The man in gray passed into the drawing-room, leaving Ludgrave and Gruenberg with the body of Boyd. From behind the black mask the eyes of the diplomat watched the visitor speculatively. In a couple of minutes the man in gray reappeared.

"The Falconbund will give you until to-morrow night to find Mr. Croyden," he said, addressing Ludgrave. "You will find a blue-light cab in front of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Fifth Avenue at midnight. Do not neglect to enter it. We will give to Mr. Croyden twenty-four hours more in which to accede to our terms, and during that period we will consider the representations which you have made to us to-night.

"It is unnecessary to warn you that it is only with Mr. Croyden that you may allow yourself to speak of the affairs of the Falconbund. Meantime you may know that Miss Croyden has suffered no injury at our hands. That's all. Good night."

Ludgrave turned toward the portières between which he had entered the room. He started violently and trembled as the gray face of Boyd suddenly confronted him and seemed to peer into his own.

He fancied he could hear the beating of his own heart as he gasped for breath and passed a hand over his eyes to shut out from his vision the dreadful features of the dead.

An icy temperature seemed to pervade the room, and as the face of Boyd disappeared from his view he looked around him wildly.

All was dark.

He was seated in a moving taxicab!

With an exclamation of astonishment, the young man looked through one of the windows. Speeding up Eighth Avenue, the cab was crossing Fourteenth Street!

The subtlety of the Falconbund had balked his efforts to discover the location of the mysterious streets.

Again he drew his watch from his pocket and struck a match. It was now a quarter after four.

Since he had entered the cab in front of the New Theater his powers of observation had been dormant for about two hours.

He was about to extinguish the light on the burning match when his attention was attracted by a pipe that lay beside him on the seat.

The light went out, and as he reached for the pipe and passed his fingers over it, he knew it was not his own. Deciding, however, that he would have a better look at it when he reached his rooms, he slipped it into one of his pockets.

When Columbus Circle was reached, the cab turned into Central Park. It had proceeded only a little way, however, when it began to slow down and, finally it stopped. The chauffeur alighted and opened the door. Scarcely was Ludgrave on the ground, however, when the chauffeur, without speaking, slammed the door and quickly returned to his seat.

Ludgrave turned toward him. There was something in the attitude of the man that excited his curiosity. He was taller than the one who had driven the cab downtown, and yet his dimly seen profile seemed familiar. In a few moments the cab was gone.

A walk of quarter of an hour took Ludgrave to his apartments. The elevator-man informed him that no one had called to see him in his absence. When he reached his rooms he at once proceeded to call up the Croyden residence on the telephone. Wilken informed him that his master had not returned, nor had he sent any sort of communication to the house.

Half bewildered by the experience which he had undergone, Ludgrave seated himself in an easy chair before a gas-log, and addressed his thoughts to a review of the situation.

Boyd was dead, Croyden still was missing, and the mystery of the lost streets was as baffling as it had been before.

Was it real or feigned surprise that had been manifested by the masked figures in King's Court when he had spoken of the death of Dodson?

The manner in which he had been questioned by them concerning Fenwood's relation to the affair also excited his wonder. If Fenwood was in league with the Falconbund, why had he not reported that he had killed the valet? If he was not one of the society's agents, why had he been eavesdropping? Why had he murdered Dodson?

Mentally and physically fatigued, Ludgrave realized that the problems which confronted him might be viewed more clearly after a period of sleep and rest. By the time he should wake, Croyden might have returned to his home.

Having thus decided to rest, he prepared to spend the remainder of the night on the couch in the sitting-room where he scarcely could fail to hear the telephone-bell if it should ring.

Accordingly, he removed his outer garments and brought out a sheet and some blankets from his bedroom. Before lying down, however, it occurred to him to place on a chair beside him the revolver which was now in a pocket of his overcoat. As he thrust a hand into the overcoat pocket his fingers came in contact with the pipe he had found in the taxicab. The revolver, however, was missing. Drawing out the pipe, he looked at it curiously.

It was a bull-dog brier, and on the back of the bowl were carved the outlines of the head of a sphinx.

It was Fenwood's!

In a moment there came back to him the impression that his mind had received just after he had alighted from the taxicab in the park, a few minutes before.

He remembered that there was something strangely familiar in the attitude and faintly seen profile of the man who had opened the door. Quickly the suspicion became conviction.

The Falconbund's chauffeur was the murderer of Dodson!

CHAPTER XI.

A SENTENCE OF DEATH.

IT was not until a quarter after eleven o'clock that Ludgrave awoke. His sleep had been heavy and he rose refreshed. After learning from Wilken that nothing had been heard from Croyden, he bathed, shaved, and dressed, and then walked briskly to a restaurant and had his breakfast.

When he returned to his room he called up police headquarters on the telephone and asked to be connected with the inspector in charge of the detective bureau. A few moments later he heard his voice.

"Have you been informed that Boyd is dead?" he asked.

There was a pause, then the inspector answered:

"Yes."

"What am I to do?" the young man asked.

"As little as you can," replied the other curtly. "Your friend was not the only person engaged on the case, but it is a matter with which the police have nothing to do at present. Until you hear from me direct, I will be unable to give you any information, so it will be useless for you to communicate with me again."

Ludgrave was about to reply, when a click coming to him over the wire indicated that the inspector had hung up the receiver.

With a muttered oath, Ludgrave replaced his own receiver on its hook, and turned away. He felt as if he had been gagged, muzzled, and bound.

Hour after hour passed, but no visitor appeared, nor did the young man receive any message that had to do with the mystery that engrossed his mind.

He began acutely to feel that in this hour of peril he stood alone. Both the Falconbund and the police had sealed his lips, and he was compelled to move in the dark.

If, at the next meeting, his explanation should be found unsatisfactory by the Falconbund, there was little doubt that they would condemn him to the fate that had overtaken Boyd. If he failed to take the blue-light cab that would appear in front of St. Patrick's Cathedral at midnight, death would come to him as quickly and as certainly as it had come to Dodson.

At seven o'clock he had dinner sent to his rooms. When this was finished, he paced the floor restlessly, and then lay on the couch with his face buried in one of the cushions.

A little after nine Wilken called him up to inquire whether he had heard anything of Mr. Croyden, who still had failed to communicate with his house,

It seemed to be almost impossible now to keep the knowledge of the millionaire's disappearance from the public.

Ludgrave warned the butler to refrain from expressing to any one his fears concerning his master, and the man promised to do so.

By eleven o'clock the young man began to prepare himself for his meeting with the Falconbund. At half past eleven he slipped another revolver into the right pocket of his overcoat, and set off for St. Patrick's Cathedral. Promptly at midnight a blue glow met his view, and the taxicab on which it appeared drew up at the curb by which he stood.

As the chauffeur leaned toward him Ludgrave looked at him searchingly. The man was neither Fenwood nor the chauffeur who had taken him down-town on the two former occasions.

"Cab, sir?" asked the man.

"King's Court," directed Ludgrave shortly, and stepped into the vehicle.

He noted now that the chauffeur had made no move to open the door for him, as the other chauffeur had done on the night before. But when, after seating himself, he tried the door, he found that he was unable to open it. His efforts to lower the windows were vain.

The cab proceeded at a fairly rapid pace down Fifth Avenue until Forty-Second Street was reached. Here it turned westward, and, as it rounded the corner, Ludgrave, rising quickly, smashed the glass window at the back of the vehicle. The sound of the falling glass failed to reach his ears.

From the frame he removed all the fragments that remained and threw them out. As he glanced at the open space, he was satisfied that the chauffeur, looking over his shoulder, would be unable to see that the glass was missing.

If a subtle, odorless gas should be released, the open window would enable some

of it to escape, even if enough remained to rob him of consciousness at last. The young man reasoned that his lapse into insensibility would be less rapid than it had been before, when the interior of the cab was entirely closed, and he was resolved that if this was so he might be able to fight it off.

Eighth Avenue soon was reached, and the cab moved southward. Scarcely was it well straightened to its new course, however, when Ludgrave realized that he was beginning to breathe more quickly. As he saw that the moment for his struggle had arrived, a feeling of desperation stole over him. Quickly drawing out his revolver, he struck the lower corner of the window on his left a sharp blow with the butt of the weapon. The glass cracked, and a piece about ten inches square fell to the street.

Ludgrave, though still breathing quickly, felt that he still was holding his own.

At the time the glass had fallen, the chauffeur appeared not to have heard it. A few moments later, however, he looked over his shoulder. Ludgrave lurched forward, assuming a position that screened the open space in the glass from the chauffeur's view.

As the chauffeur looked ahead of him again, Ludgrave extended an arm along the lower part of the window, and brought his body toward the break in the pane in such a manner that, while hiding the open space, he would be able to breathe the fresh air over his shoulder. His attitude now was that of a man who had lapsed into unconsciousness. With half-open eyes, however, he continued to watch the chauffeur.

The speed of the cab now began to increase, and when Thirty-Fourth Street was reached the chauffeur again looked behind him. Apparently, the attitude of the passenger was satisfactory, for soon afterward the chauffeur was gazing in front of him, nor did he turn until Canal Street was reached. The position of Ludgrave remained the same. Still conscious, the young man was breathing freely.

And now, instead of continuing on to Laight Street, the cab turned to the west until it reached West Street. Along this, at a rapid pace, it proceeded southward until it arrived at the Cortlandt Street ferry-house. Into this it turned, and passed onto a waiting ferry-boat.

Two or three minutes later the taxicab was being borne across the river.

Ludgrave now was fearful lest the chauffeur, not having the operation of the machine to occupy his mind, would alight and look into the interior of the cab. This, however, the man failed to do, and the trip across the river was devoid of incident.

When the other side of the Hudson was reached, the taxicab moved off the boat, and in a few moments was speeding through the streets of Jersey City. Keeping a watchful eye on the man in front of him, Ludgrave carefully followed the course the cab was taking. At length a familiar street corner met his view.

The cab was entering Walpole Street!

The ride from the ferry had occupied seven minutes.

After drawing up in front of the King's Court house, the chauffeur alighted and opened the door on the right side of the cab. The door window Ludgrave had broken was on the left. The young man stepped out, and, as he ascended the steps leading to the door of the house, he looked over his shoulder. The chauffeur was again at his place at the wheel, and the cab was moving off. Apparently the man had failed to observe that two of the windows of his vehicle had been broken.

It now occurred to Ludgrave that on this, and former occasions, it had been somewhat singular that the cab should leave while he was entering the house instead of waiting his return to the street.

"But they probably have decided that they will make an end of me this time," he muttered.

Then the door before which he was standing moved inward. Ludgrave entered the dark hall, and, without waiting for a direction from the man who had admitted him, he continued on to the door of the drawing-room.

A black-masked figure in a black domino was standing in the middle of the apartment. When the visitor had entered the room, the door was closed softly behind him.

"Well, you have an answer from Mr. Croyden?" asked the voice of Gruenberg.

"I have been unable to see Mr. Croyden, who has not been at his residence since I was here last night," Ludgrave replied.

There was a long pause.

"Come with me," said Gruenberg, leading the way to the room in the rear.

Following his guide, Ludgrave passed through the apartment in which he had seen the body of Boyd on the night before. With-

out halting, however, Gruenberg continued on to the hall, and thence to a little yard in the rear of the building.

After crossing this, the two men entered a second building, and as Ludgrave glanced over his shoulder he saw that five figures in masks and dominoes were following him. A dark hallway next was traversed, and at length Gruenberg halted in a large room that had the appearance of a painter's or carpenter's shop.

In the middle of this was a long, unpainted table, at the head of which stood the gray-clad, masked figure with whom he had spoken on the night before.

"There is no answer, then?" the gray man asked, addressing Gruenberg.

"None," the diplomat replied.

"Well, we expected none," moodily returned the man in gray.

From three doors masked men now were filing into the big room. Thirty had entered when Ludgrave saw something that caused his pulse to beat more quickly.

Helen Croyden, pallid and wan, was being led toward the table. As she halted beside it, Ludgrave heard the closing of the doors. Then the gray man broke the silence.

"Men of the Falconbund," he began, "the man who stands before you now is one who came to us of his own volition, invited our confidence, and then attempted to deliver us into the hands of our enemies. He has forfeited his life, but that life I am going to ask of you. If certain conditions which I will name are complied with, I will ask you to release our prisoner. If the terms which I name are rejected, I will pronounce sentence of death. Red Domino, you may place the cup."

A short, thick-set figure in red mask and domino advanced deliberately and placed on the table before Ludgrave a large, silver drinking-cup.

The gray man turned to Helen.

"Miss Croyden, failing to obtain from your father an answer to the demands which we have made upon him, we must deal directly with you," he went on. "The life of this man Ludgrave is in your hands.

"If by noon to-day you are the wife of Leopold of Towardein, having been married in a public place and in a manner which will give all men to understand that the step was taken of your own free will, Edward Ludgrave will be released, and he will have nothing further to fear from the Falconbund, unless he is found in league with our enemies. If you fail to agree at once to this demand, the man who stands before you now will be sentenced to death.

"What is your answer?"

Trembling so violently that it was manifest that she was on the verge of collapse, the young woman turned her horrified face toward the man whom she had treated so coldly when he had been admitted to her presence two nights before. For several moments each held the other's gaze. Helen's very soul seemed to be burning in her eyes. Ludgrave was as pale as if he already had drunk of the poisoned cup which had been set before him. The words of the man in gray had dazed him.

In fate's balance his life was weighed against the Croyden honor.

What the woman he loved was reading in his face he could not know, but he saw what she had in her mind to do. When he had seen her last, she was resolved to let her decision follow the wishes of her father. It was clear that up to this point she had resisted all efforts to coerce her to accept Leopold. Now, however, the very acme of brutality was attained in an attempt to break her will.

The heart of Ludgrave leaped as the gaze of the young woman fell. When she raised her eyes again, she looked toward the man in gray.

Her lips trembled, and Ludgrave knew she was about to speak. He knew, too, that however she spoke now she must ever afterward feel that her words had placed a stain upon her soul.

"No!" the young man cried in a hollow voice. "Before she speaks it will be well for all of you to hear from me. The brutal sacrifice which you demand is beyond her power to make.

"The crime-stained wretch who is offered to her as a husband dares not see me set at liberty, for, given my liberty, I will be in league with every foe he has on earth. With open eyes I have crossed the Hudson to meet you here, and, when I am free, the Falconbund will be powerless to seal my lips."

"You've said enough," the gray man interrupted, as he leaned over the table and glared at the man who had defied him. "Though Helen Croyden will become the wife of Leopold at last, her consent will come too late to save your life. In the name of the Falconbund, I now pass upon

you the sentence of death. You will drink of the cup, or submit to a form of execution which we reserve for those who prove their cowardice."

"Suicide is the last resort of the coward," Ludgrave answered firmly. "Those who seek my life will have to take it."

Stepping quickly aside to escape the grasp of any one who might have approached him from behind, he drew his revolver and leveled it at the man who had been addressing him.

He pulled the trigger, but his aim was faulty and the ball flew wide. A moment later strong hands gripped him, and the weapon was knocked from his grasp.

"There is no danger! Wait!"

The words were spoken by some one who held one of his shoulders. Turning quickly, he looked into a pair of greenish eyes. They were the eyes of the man with whom he had spoken in Mount Vernon.

The hands which had grasped him were removed, and he found himself at liberty. Again he looked in the direction of the man in gray.

But all the figures in dominoes appeared to have lost interest in the prisoners of the Falconbund. They were looking now at an unmasked man who just had entered the room through the door through which Ludgrave had followed Gruenberg.

The man was Fenwood!

The man in gray had stiffened suddenly, and was gazing at the intruder.

"Who are you?" he demanded shakily.

"A member of his majesty's Department of Secret Intelligence, and, therefore, unable to place under arrest Leopold of Towardein, chief of the Falconbund," replied the young Englishman easily.

The man in gray flashed a quick glance round the room.

Fenwood smiled grimly.

"Of the men present only six are adherents of your royal highness," he said. "The others are representatives of the United States Secret Service and the Jersey City police. As these will compel you to answer charges brought against you as the result of crimes committed by the Falconbund in this country, it scarcely is probable that I will be permitted to take you to England to answer the charges which I had hoped to bring against you there. Several of your supporters have confessed, and—"

"Stop him!" one of the maskers cried shrilly. "The poison of the cup—"

But the man in gray already had slipped a hand under his mask.

As Fenwood rushed toward him, the man who had pronounced the sentence of death on Ludgrave fell to the floor.

The Englishman drew the gray mask aside. The contorted features thus revealed were those of Prince Leopold of Towardein!

All masks and dominoes were being cast aside as Fenwood crossed to where Helen Croyden was leaning on the arm of Edward Ludgrave.

"Your father is in an automobile by the door," the Englishman explained quietly. "He is anxious, so you had better go to him."

He smiled faintly as he glanced toward Ludgrave.

"Our men persuaded him to lie low until our work here was done. I'll see you later, Ned," he said.

Together Ludgrave and Helen made their way to the yard and thence through the dark hall to the door, in front of which Ludgrave had alighted from the taxicab.

"You will come home—with us?" Helen asked feebly.

Ludgrave shook his head.

"I must see Fenwood first," he answered dully. "Later in the day—perhaps."

Helen's fingers clutched his sleeve.

"When you came here the other night, Ned, they told me that you were Leopold's friend, and that you were in a plot to get me over to Jersey in order to get me into Leopold's hands," she said.

"I did not believe them until they told me that you were in the house, and that I might gather from what you said as to whether or not you were trying to deceive me. They told me that you were prepared to act as the Falconbund's messenger to my father. When you were brought in to me, I was still in doubt, but when you spoke of having arranged with my father to marry me in New Jersey, the statement seemed so preposterous that I began to believe that what Gruenberg said was true.

"You had never asked me to marry you, and I did not know you cared for me enough for that. It was not until you left, that things came to me more clearly. It seemed not improbable that my father had planned the marriage to save me from Leopold. I am sorry I doubted you, Ned."

In the darkness of the hall their lips met; then, with a wildly beating heart, Ludgrave led Helen to the automobile in which her

father awaited her. Croyden had eyes and hands only for his daughter then, So Ludgrave reentered the house.

At the end of the hall he met Fenwood.

"Come, Ned, they have no further use for us in there," the Englishman said, half laughingly. "Your American Secret Service men and these Jersey bobbies are doing all that is necessary to be done, so let's go back to Manhattan together. The Falconbund taxis are all engaged at present, so we will have to find another somewhere, or foot it to the ferry."

A taxicab was soon found, however, and when the two men were seated in it, Ludgrave gave rein to his curiosity.

"Now, how did it all happen, Fen?" he asked.

"Well, the story is too long to be told in a breath, Ned," the other answered. "The fact is, however, I have never left the British army, but was assigned temporarily to the Department of Secret Intelligence two years ago.

"It was suspected then that Leopold had designs on the throne of Hunabia, and it was in the interest of England to prevent him from attaining his object. That is how the Department of Secret Intelligence got into the thing.

"Leopold, after leaving England, six months ago, came to this country. He had met the Croydens abroad, and it was clear enough that he was after Helen and the old man's money, which would have been enough to stake a Hunabian revolution. I was detailed to follow him and watch his movements. On the way over I, knowing you to be a pretty close friend of Helen Croyden's, determined to keep as closely to you as possible. I succeeded pretty well in this object until you caught me eavesdropping."

Fenwood stopped abruptly and puffed vigorously at his pipe.

"Who killed Dodson, Fen?" Ludgrave asked.

"A man who heard him reporting to the Falconbund, over the telephone, what it was you and Croyden were about to do. He thought I had left the house, and when I tried to steal out he saw me.

"He knew then that I had discovered the nature of his game, but he did not let me know he knew. There was little doubt in my mind that, in order to save himself, he would have the Falconbund mark me for death. What was I to do?"

There was another pause.

"And so I did it," Fenwood went on. "When I left your apartments, I went at once to Boyd, of the Secret Service, who had been working with me in an attempt to discover the members of the Falconbund Council.

"The matter was then reported to the inspector in charge of the detective bureau, who gave instructions that anything that had to do with a case in the Ludgrave apartments was to be reported to him. The police have been just a little shy of the Falconbund, and have been ready enough to leave the fighting of it to the Secret Service.

"Now it is always the policy of the Secret Service, as it is with our own department, to learn from others all they can, and to reveal nothing. All that Boyd and his colleagues wanted was to have you keep your appointments with the Falconbund, so that they would be able to follow you.

"In following you last night, Boyd came a cropper. Behind him was a party of Falconbundists, whose duty it was to see that you were not followed. They killed Boyd, his companion, and the chauffeur. But after these Falconbundists was a cab containing Bradlaw and myself."

"Bradlaw?" Ludgrave exclaimed.

"Yes — Boyd's pal — the fellow you talked with in Mount Vernon."

Ludgrave nodded.

"We were too late to save Boyd, and it was the cab containing the murderers and dead bodies that we followed to Walpole Street," Fenwood continued. "And right here I may tell you that the section of Jersey City in which that mysterious house is located is populated only by Falconbundists. It is only when a blue-light cab is expected, that 'Walpole Street' and 'King's Court' appear on street signs."

And thus was one mystery cleared.

"When you were on your way home last night, and while you were under the influence of the gas which the chauffeur forced into the cab from time to time, Bradlaw and I nailed him. We confronted him with the evidence we had against the Falconbund people, and he weakened and confessed.

"We persuaded him to take back the cab after I had left you in the park. But the next morning he did not report to the Falconbund for duty, which accounts for the fact that you had another man to-night. To-night, having taken advantage of the

chauffeur's confession, we arrested several of the members of the council, then, in their masks and dominoes, police and Secret Service men entered the meeting-place.

"What followed you have very excellent reason to know. The death of Leopold, who was the organizer of the society, and the arrest of other members of the council, will bring the Falconbund to an end, and I will return to the regular service in the army."

For several moments the young men rode on in silence.

"What time will you go to the Croydens'?" Fenwood asked at length.

"This afternoon — sometime," replied Ludgrave shortly.

"Well, unless you intend turning in for a sleep as soon as you get home, I'll go with you and finish that pipe I began the other night," said the Englishman, yawning.

"That Dodson affair will have to be kept dark, you know. Hallo, we're up to Forty-Second Street already, and day is dawning."

He stifled another yawn, then he added abstractedly:

"And so it looks, Ned, as if some day you would have the handling of those Croyden millions, after all."

(The end.)

LOVE'S AUCTION.

WHO will buy a sonnet sweet,
  Rondeau bright, or virelay?
Who will purchase verses neat?
  Hasten, lovers, while ye may.
Come and scan my tender ware
  Writ by me for Phyllis' eyes—
Praising Phyllis, slender, fair;
  Lauding Phyllis to the skies.
When to sing them would I fain,
  Longing thus to charm her ear,
Turning from me in disdain,
  Flouting Phyllis would not hear.
    Going! Going!

So do I, in vengeful mood,
  On the market fling my song;
Short on maids who would be wooed,
  Still on verses I am long.
Swains enamored, won't you try
  Distichs to your languid fair?
Whether blue or brown her eye—
  What the color of her hair—
Change the praises as you may,
  Still the rhythm flows along.
Must I give my wares away?
  Can't I sell them for a song?
    Going! Going! Bidders none.

Lovers ye, who scorn my rimes,
  Let me learn your wooing rule.
Am I far behind the times?
  Must I go again to school?
Gone, you say, the golden days,
  When in verse sweet love was told?
Maids are won in other ways;
  These are days of naught but gold!
Hear I your replies aright,
  I will drop my riming neat,
And instead, to her indite
  Copies of my balance sheet.

James King Duffy.

For $100. Cash

By Edwin Baird

IT was in the Union Loop in Chicago that I first made the acquaintance of Larry McGuff.

I was standing before a newspaper office in Monroe Street—surveying, by the way, a small section of that squirming, wriggling, crawling, swarming mass of life that continues to make a seething hotchpotch of a little patch of Illinois shackled by an Elevated railroad, while vast prairies yawn and stretch from Lake Michigan to Cape Girardeau — when the swinging doors of a near-by saloon opened and a man was quietly and decisively ejected.

There were no words, no row. The doors swung out, a white-jacketed servitor thrust him forth, and the doors swung back.

He edged out of the bustling crowd, turned and saw me, grinned sheepishly, and munched a handful of popcorn.

He was a small, slim man, perhaps thirty-five, of sallow complexion and ascetic cast; though hatless and wretchedly clad, his face was clean, his hands well kept; his jaw was firm, his lips thin, his brow high, and on his aquiline nose gleamed a pair of eye-glasses.

Under different circumstances I should have accounted him a studious chap who probably studied metaphysics and read Kant and Milton for recreation. Dressed decently, he would have looked every inch a philosopher.

Knowing that I had witnessed his ignominious exit, and seeing no enmity in my glance, he sidled nearer, smiling ingratiatingly.

"Well, pal," he observed, "I got a fistful o' popcorn and a sardine sandwich, anyway. Not bad, eh, for one swipe?"

So saying, he took a very small sandwich from a very ragged pocket, examined it critically, and swallowed it in two bites.

"What was the trouble?" I inquired.

"Oh — free-lunch grabbing," he answered indifferently, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. "It's a hard game, friend."

I agreed with him, and asked if he had been idle long.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Ever since I got stung on this body," he said, tapping his chest. "I was a freight-handler before, and a good one, but this mollycoddle thing is all to the bad at that trade."

Again he tapped himself.

I looked at the fellow sharply. But his gray eyes met mine steadily, and his face betrayed no guile. I requested his name.

"Well, I ain't exactly sure," he said slowly, caressing his chin and cheek with a thoughtful finger. "I call myself Larry McGuff; but you see— Say, maybe you'd like to hear the story."

Silently I inserted two fingers in my vest-pocket and produced a quarter of a dollar.

"My dear man," I said sorrowfully, "I have lived in Chicago a number of years. I was not born in Cabbagetown, Arkansas, nor yet in New York. Both your apparel and your language prohibit the aphasia thing, that being a luxury only for the rich. You should try a new lay."

I held up the coin.

"Which would you rather have now—a dinner or a drink? Take your choice. If

a drink, take the money; if a dinner, come with me to a restaurant."

To my extreme surprise, he chose the dinner, assuring me he never touched liquor. We went to a good restaurant in the same block, and I ordered for us both. What incredulity I still held of his sobriety vanished when he refused both cocktails and wine. Nor would he so much as take cognac with his coffee.

Our repast finished and cigars begun, he slipped down in his chair until he was resting on the back of his neck, and sent a spiral of smoke toward the ceiling with much relish.

"Now, don't forget the story," I reminded him.

"Oh, I ain't forgot," he said, sitting up quickly and assuming a more seemly attitude. "It's a sad story, friend, and a touchin'. And terrible strange and unusual," he added lugubriously.

"So much the better," I encouraged.

He did not answer immediately, but sat rolling his cigar reflectively between his long, slim fingers. Then suddenly he leaned across the table and gripped my arm in his bony hand.

"Neighbor," he said solemnly, "you've knowed me a hour, more or less. You've sized me up. Now, tell me the truth, neighbor—have you saw anything irregular about me?"

"I have," I replied. "You look like a scholar and talk like a—well, like a truckman."

"I knew it," he exclaimed, sitting back and nodding his head slowly. "I knew you'd saw it. Everybody does. How can they help it when I—

"But, hold on! Let's get the head o' this story, or it'll get ahead of us.

"As I said before, I call myself Larry McGuff, though I ain't sure that's my name. Anyways, I was a freight-handler some four years ago, and boomed the beam at about the two-hundred mark, and had muscles like a mule and worked steady. But hard times come, my friend. Somebody made a panic, and I couldn't work no more'n a count.

"Nobody wasn't doin' no shippin', because there wasn't no shippin' to be done; and there wasn't no jobs for such as me. Well, the worse went to the worst, and for three days and nights I tramped the streets o' this looloo town with empty pockets and emptier stomick."

Again he leaned over and fastened his talons on my arm and his sad eyes on my face.

"Friend," he said, with excessive gravity, "do you know what it is to be hungry? I mean starvin' hungry, killin' hungry. No, I know you don't. Well, it's just hell, friend.

"The second day's the worst. Then you feel like there's a big hungry rat in your stomick gnawin' to get out. And you think of all the good things you ever et and remember how they tasted—pies and steaks and fried sweet potatoes.

"But the third day there's only a dull, awful ache, and you feel all empty inside, and you know if anybody so much as even pushed you you'd just topple over like a paper man.

"The third day I was terrible desp'rate. I roamed this loop like a starvin' wolf. It was January, and snowin' heavy. I prowled through the crowds, and everybody seems to have plenty o' money and plenty to eat. And all the time that awful pain in my stomick keeps throbbin' and throbbin'.

"Once I seen a lady, all in furs and di'monds, come out of a jool'ry-store and start for her carriage. I dodges through the crowd and makes for her. I was goin' to grab some o' them furs and run. But before I reaches her she enters the carriage, and the door slams, and she's gone.

"I can't beg. I tries, but I can't. Once I sneaks up to a plump, rosy man, standin' in front of a restaurant pickin' his teeth and lookin' fat and contented, and asks him for a dime.

"'What!' he says, as though I'd struck him in his face instead of his pocketbook. 'A big, husky guy like you beggin'! Beat it,' he says, 'before I sick the cops on you.'

"Along in the afternoon I crawls into a alley and drops down behind a garbage-can. I was all in, friend. That hungry rat was back, too, and was gnawin' my stomick ferocious. Then some'in' blazed up inside me and burnt like hot steel. I wanted to strangle somebody. I wanted to kill.

"'By the Lord,' I yells, 'somebody's to blame for this! I'd sell myself, body and soul, for some'in' to eat!'

"I stops sudden, scared by hearin' my own voice. Then, thinkin' over them last words, I gets a crazy idea.

"Stickin' from the garbage-can I sees a big pasteboard box. I rips off the sides, and spreads the top and bottom on the bricks

and prints on the white surface with a marker I still had:

I AM STARVING.
I WANT TO SELL
MYSELF.

"I fastens the pieces together with some string and makes a sandwich, me formin' the meat, and sails out into the crowd like a madman.

"I paraded State Street from Lake to Van Buren, and I was some sensation. Everybody rubbers, and the cop eyes me suspicious. I pays no attention to none of 'em, but pushes angry through the crowd, lookin' straight ahead and grittin' my teeth, for that red-hot thing is still blazin' and I'm killin' mad.

"Once a fellow in freak clothes dodges in front o' me to read my sign, and I stops and doubles my fists and sticks my face into his and says harsh:

"'Well! D'you wanter buy me?'

"And he trembles all over and shakes his head and fades away quick and silent. I countermarches at Van Buren Street, and my fame must've spread, for the return trip is worse'n the first. All round I can hear people talkin' about me and pityin' me, and this makes me madder'n ever, and I plunges on fierce, swearin' below my breath.

"Near the Masonic Temple somebody grabs my shoulder, and when I jerks away and turns round I sees it's a big, powerful gent in a fur overcoat, a yodel hat, and a black Vandyke beard. He's even bigger'n me, and I stood six feet three then and was built accordin'.

"He looks me careful all over before he speaks; then he takes my arm, and says quiet:

"'Come on.'

"'Wanter buy me?' I growls. 'If not, leg-go me.'

A crowd gathers immediate, eyin' us curious.

"'Come on, you fool!' he orders in a low voice, seemin' peeved at the rubbernecks.

"Well, sir, I thinks it's a fly cop got me, so I peels my sandwich sign and chucks it in the gutter and follows him obedient. He takes me to a swell boofet round the corner, and we sets in a little cubbyhole place, and he buys me brandy. After I has it down he surprises me intense by sayin' curt:

"'How much you want for yourself?'

"I blinks my eyes. 'Ain't you a bull?' I says.

"'No,' says he. 'How much?'

"'One hundred dollars cash,' says I, namin' the biggest amount I could think of.

"'Here's your money,' says he, and quick as a wink he flips two fifties from a yellow roll and hands 'em to me. 'We'll draw up a bill of sale now,' he goes on; and sure enough he calls for pen and paper, and makes out a long document full of 'whereases' and 'therefores,' and has me sign it; and the barkeep and two other fellows writes their names as witnesses.

"They thinks it's a joke, and makes all kind o' cracks. But I knows it ain't no joke. I can tell by the look on this big party's face. After it's over he sets up the drinks all round, and we goes out and boards a taxicab.

"Soon as the taxi starts he pulls down the curtains and a black silk scarf from his pocket, and ties it over my eyes, knottin' it firm behind.

"'What's this for?' I demands.

"'No questions, please,' he says cold and polite.

"And he don't give another squeak till the taxi stops. It was a unpleasant long time before it did, and we must've clicked off about thirty dollars' worth of miles. Then he says:

"'Keep your head down when you get out, and don't get out till I say so.'

"I hears the door open, then I hears him dickerin' outside with the chaffer, and then his hand grips mine, and I ducks my head and climbs out careful, feelin' my way with my foot. The taxi snorts and whizzes away. The big party puts his arm round my waist and leads me across what must've been a pavement, then up three or four steps.

"I hasn't no more idea where I was than a blind rabbit. But it's still snowin'. I can feel it meltin' on the back of my neck, while I stands there with my dome bobbed like a come-on in a spook show.

"I hears a door open, I'm pushed forward, and the door closes. It's warm where I was now, and there's a carpet under my feet that feels like warm mush. Then a hand takes mine and guides me round curves and things, and I hears some'in'

grate behind me, and then a creak, and the floor begins to shake and then rises gentle.

"Up, up, up I goes. Then I'm hep—I'm in a elevator. It must've been the third floor we gets off at. There's more of the follow-me stunt, and the bandage is jerked off my eyes. And, friend, I was some dazzled.

"I was standin' in the most elygant, most beeyootiful room in the world. That guy Nearyo himself couldn't've wanted no sweller. It was ahead o' this cafy, swell as it is.

"Big mirrors with gold frames, furniture that seemed all ivory and butterfly wings, oil paintings big as bed-sheets, marble statues of women, and a tremenjus shanty-cleer that sparkles like a barrel o' di'monds.

"'Please sit down, Larry,' says Black Whiskers.

"I stops gaping, and starts for one o' them spider-leg chairs. But the minute I moves, a tiger-skin I'm standin' on slips on the polished floor and I goes sprawlin'. But I gets to my feet and the chair, and just set drinkin' in the elygance 'round me.

"Then the man who's bought me rings a bell, and a little Jap pops in like a cuckoo and taps his cheek-bone, and a few cluck-clucks is exchanged, and cuckoo taps himself again and pops out.

"My owner leaves, too, but returns prompt, minus his fur coat and plus a smokin'-jacket and a perfecto, and shows me into a bath-room all in marble, and the hot water is steamin' into a long tub hollowed out of a solid chunk. And there stands that little Jap in a white-duck suit, holdin' some bath-towels and grinnin' like a Billikin.

"'Beat it!' I says to him stern. 'Percival don't need nursey to give him his tub.'

"Brownie keeps on grinnin' and cocks his head at his master, who clutters to him, then turns to me and says:

"'You'll find bath-robes and slippers in the cab'net there, Larry. Anything more you want—just ring this bell and Toko will bring it.'

"They both leave me, and I locks the door and sheds my rags and slips into that big tub of warm, scented water. Friend, that was a king's bath — perfumed soap, sponges, brushes, shower gag, and all the hot water I wanted. Fine!

"And afterward I fishes a soft dressin'-gown and some silky slippers from the cab'net, and I finds a box of Turkish cigarettes and a bottle o' sherry, and helps myself plentiful to both. I'm feelin' a heap diff'rent, and them throbs in my stomick is gone.

"Somebody knocks, and when I opens the door I finds little Toko. From his chatterin' I makes out that the honorable master sends his compliments to the honorable guest, and awaits his pleasure in the dinin'-room down-stairs.

"I finds him in a swell room on the first floor. He's settin' at a round table all dec'rated with silver dishes and cut glass and a big vase o' red roses.

"Friend, that was an appycure's feed. I never et no finer. Nobody never et no finer. Brownie does the waitin', and I keeps him hoppin' bringin' me grub. It's rich grub, and I stows it away till I feel like a goose."

"When I can't stuff another mouthful down I sets back and sighs regretful, for there's still a heap on the table that ain't been touched. Black Whiskers must've been off his feed, for he don't eat much—just sets and nibbles like a rabbit with lettuce.

"Toko clears away everything 'cept the roses, and brings cigarettes and black coffee. The big party sets eyin' me reflective, sippin' his coffee and drawin' lazylike on his cigarette till his whiskers seems afire. And then says:

"'Larry, would you like some champagne?'

"'Would a duck eat a June-bug?' I retorts. 'Or a chorus-girl the duck? Say, jab me with a fork and see if I'm awake—no, don't do it; if I'm dreamin', I don't wanter wake up.'

"Well, Toko fetches a quart of champagne in a wine-cooler, and sets glasses. But Black Whiskers shakes his head and pushes his'n away, and I sees it's up to me to finish the bubbles. While I'm gettin' away with glass number three I hears 'em chatterin' together in a low tone, then little Brownie Man clucks a couple o' times and fills my glass again and leaves the room; and when he don't show up no more I guesses he'd blowed the house.

"While I'm holdin' the bottle upside down and gettin' the last drop, this big party fetches another and fills my glass and smiles encouragin'. I takes it at one gulp and fills her again. And so on, till number two is half gone.

"It's the first time I ever see any o' this fizz-water, and I guess I ain't wise as to

how it's to be took. Anyways, I feels like I'm floatin' on a sunny cloud. I gushes language like a busted water-plug.

"I talks in a loud voice. I thinks of all sorts of witty things. But all of a sudden I realizes that I'm the whole show and that Black Whiskers ain't opened his head in thirty minutes.

"And when I sees him settin' there with his elbows on the table, eyin' me so steady and solemn, I begins to suspect a trick. I shuts up like a oyster. I looks him steady in the eye. There's a dead silence. I can hear the clock tickin' in the corner. Then it strikes eight.

"I remember I counted the strokes. And still we sets there silent, eyin' each other like a couple o' snakes.

"Then I begins to prickle all over. I can't stand it no longer.

"'What's the meanin' o' this?' I roars. 'Whatcher want o' me? What's your game, anyway?'

"I stops. He don't speak. There's another awful silence, and I can hear the clock tickin' again.

"Then I pushes back my chair and tries to rise. But it's no use. My pins is weak, and I falls back like a wet rag. Then everything begins to move. Sideboard, table, chairs, all is doin' a gay whirligig. And I'm goin' round, too.

"Now and then I catches sight o' Black Whiskers, and he's turnin' with the rest. Round and round and round we goes, like a flyin' Dutchman. I grips my chair and holds on tight, for every second we're whizzin' faster.

"Then I can't hold on no longer, we're goin' so swift, and I loses my grip and falls off, and I don't know no more—till I feels my head splittin' open. Then I opens my eyes and tries to move. But I can't, friend, and when I looks down I find I'm stripped naked and strapped tight.

"There's only a dim light, and I can't make out much, but in a minute I hears a door open, and some'in' snaps, and about ten thousand incandescent lamps lights up, and I finds I'm on a glass table in a room all made o' mirrors.

"I turns my head and sees a sort of 'lectric contrivance on a table beside me. It looks like a tremenjus telegraph instrument and is all shiny with glass and wires and things. Then I looks back — and, friend, I almost screeched.

"For there, on a glass table like mine, so near I could've reached out and touched it, was a corpse! No doubt o' that. His head's turned toward me, and his eyes is sightless like a dead man's.

"He's a lean, skinny fellow, 'bout half my weight, and has long, bony arms and fingers. I shudders all over, and shuts my eyes. When I opens 'em, Black Whiskers is bendin' over me. He wears a long rubber coat and rubber gloves and goggles, and looks like a devil.

"Well, I knows talk's no use now, so I strains and tugs at them straps like a tiger. But I only hurts myself, and after a while I lays still, pantin' quick and fast.

"He looks down at me and grins, showin' his big teeth.

"'Satisfied?' he says.

"'Lemme go!' I shrieks, beginnin' to tug again. 'You're goner kill me. Lemme go!'

"'But who owns you?' he asks in surprise. 'Who'd you sell yourself to for a hundred dollars?'

"'What good's a hundred dollars to a dead man?' I yells. 'Lemme go—'

"'Now, now, don't get peevish,' he says, showin' his teeth again. 'You're not a baby, or a woman. You're a man!' he says.

"Then he wheels that 'lectric thing between me and the corpse, and fetches two rubber affairs that looks like divers' helmets. He lifts the corpse, slips one of 'em over its head clear to the shoulders, and taps a long rubber tube on it, which tube he fastens somewhere about the 'lectric thing.

"Then he comes over to me, holdin' the other helmet under his arm.

"'Now, Larry,' he says, very gentle, as though speakin' to a child, 'you're not goner die. Remember that. You're only goner sleep. Understand? Close your eyes now, my boy, and think of sleep—sleep—sleep.'

"As he murmurs them words, soothin'-like, I shuts my eyes like a fool, and the next thing I knows he has that rubber helmet over my head and tied tight round my neck. And there's queer little knobs that sticks in my ears, and there's a tube in my mouth, and two more up my nostrils; and while I'm wonderin' how in blazes I'm goner breathe, I hears a low hummin' like a beehive, and I tingles all over, and every vein in my body seems to be charged with 'lectricity.

"And then I falls asleep and has a dream.

"Friend, if I ever get hold of a dictionary and a man like Shakespeare to help me, I'm goner write some'in' about that dream. I can't describe it to you.

"I saw a million rainbows, I heard a thousand beautiful harps playin' sweet music, and awful things swarmed all round me. It was a sort o' combined Fourth o' July celebration, grand opera, and nightmare—on a tremenjus scale.

"It seems I been asleep a dozen years before I wakes. And I'm all wet and warm, and the helmet and straps is gone, and Black Whiskers is bendin' over me, his ear to my breast. When I yawns and asks him the time he jumps like I shot him.

"'Man, you're alive!' he cries, his voice tremblin' so he can't hardly speak. 'Stand up, man. You're alive, I tell you!'

"'I hopes so,' says I, climbin' off the table and stretchin'.

"Then I stops short. My arms is still in the air. My eyes is startin' from their sockets. I can't move. I'm froze with horror.

"For there, friend—there on that glass table, with the straps still 'round it, the rubber helmet beside it—is my own body—dead!

"After what seems a week I comes to my senses, and wheels about and looks in them mirrors round the room. Starin' back at me was about twenty reflections of that lean, skinny corpse. Only it ain't no corpse now.

"*It's alive, and I'm inside its skin!*

"To make sure, I raises my arms. Them reflections done the same. I kneels, I jumps, I sits. That bony man does the same. I turns and leans against the table and looks down at Larry McGuff's six-foot-three body.

"I'm breathin' hard and moppin' my brow. I can't speak. I'm struck dumb.

"Then Black Whiskers, fair bughouse with joy, grabs my hand and pumps it, and says: 'I've done it, my boy. I've done the greatest thing of all time. I've brought the dead to life.'

"Then he goes on pratflin' about 'lectro-magnets and biology, and a lot o' stuff that's about as clear to me as a Chinese rebus, and I just stares at him like a cow. I can't say a word. I wets my lips and tries to speak, but immediate I thinks o' myself layin' there dead, and I can't talk. I'm froze stiff.

"Then Black Whiskers throws off his rubber coat and gloves, and takes my arm.

"'Come, Larry,' says he, 'time to get inside some clothes now and outside some breakfast.'

"He takes me to the bath-room and I takes a plunge; then he brings me a new outfit o' clothes and I gets into 'em mechanical, and follows him down to the dinin'-room.

"But I can't eat a bite. I picks up my knife and fork and starts to cut a lamb chop; then puts 'em down, and stares dumb at them long, bony fingers. I'm considerable surprised when the clock in the corner strikes 'leven; it seems three weeks instead o' three hours since I'd heard it strike eight.

"And all the time I'm settin' there silent, gazin' at them slim fingers and puny wrists and feelin' o' them thin legs and flat chest o' that body I'm in, Black Whiskers is eatin' hearty and talkin' and laughin' gay as a canary. It's easy seen he's crazy with joy.

"Then seein' me so glum, he breaks off to say: 'Why, Larry, you're not touchin' your breakfast. What're you thinkin' of, boy?'

"I looks up at him dull.

"'I'm thinkin',' I says, feelin' like I'm talkin' in a trance, 'that 'leven P.M. is a funny time to eat breakfast.'

"Then I goes on fingerin' that body he's give me. I slides back my chair and looks at them lady's ankles, measures my biceps, feels careful all over my face. I'm still dazed, and I can't get it out o' my head I ain't dreamin', and I looks at him helpless.

"But he's too happy to notice me. He's laughin' and talkin' again joyous as ever.

"'I'll be king o' the world,' I hears him say. 'I've discovered the secret o' life. I can take a babe, dead, and I can take an old man, still alive, but almost dead, and I can take the spark o' life and the mind and the wisdom from that aged body and put it inside that of the infant.

"'You see what it means, man. It means everlastin' life—in the flesh. It means the key to the lock of the chest which holds the secret o' the universe has been found—by me!' says Black Whiskers.

"He's dabblin' his hands in a finger-bowl now and smokin' a cigarette. I gets up and walks to a lookin'-glass and gazes solemn at that shriveled thing that's got me caged inside, and I shivers all over.

"I ain't able to speak yet, but I knows

that pretty soon I'm goner break loose like a volcano. Black Whiskers comes up behind and claps me hearty on the shoulder.

"'Admirin' your new body, eh, Larry?' he says jovial. 'Well, I think you made a good exchange, my boy. The last chap who inhabited that husk—though he killed himself—was a noted young perfessor with four degrees after his name. And it's in good shape, too. You'll find it a serviceable—'

"Then the volcano erupts. I yells, and turns and grabs his windpipe.

"He removes my hands like he would a kid's, and leads me to a seat and gives me whisky, which I spits out prompt.

"'Naturally, Larry, you're excited,' he says soothin'. 'No man could get a new body as you've done, and not be. But you'll get over it.

"'Let's see,' he goes on thoughtful, 'you wanted a hundred for your old body, didn't you? Well, I'll raise the price. I'll make it a thousand. Here you are.'

"He hands me a sheaf o' bank-notes, which I counts over and stows in my inside vest pocket. There's one thousand dollars in fifties and hundreds.

"'Now stand up, Larry, and try on this coat. It's a good garment!'

"And I gets up and slides my arms into a fine, silk-lined overcoat he's holdin', and while I'm standin' there like a sheep, he slips a heavy black cloth over my eyes and ties it tight behind.

"Then the blindman stunt is repeated, and I'm led out to the street, where I feels it still snowin', and he puts me in a carriage and gets in after me, and we dashes away.

"In about a hour I hears the door open, and I'm pushed out in a snow-bank, and when I jerks the bandage off my eyes I finds I'm back in front o' the Masonic Temple, and the carriage is swallowed up in the street jam. It's broad daylight, and the clock on Field's corner tells me it's half past twelve.

"I walks down State Street, stoppin' before every lookin'-glass I comes to. I can't get used to seein' that strange, thin face look back at me, and I shudders every time I sees it.

"I tries the drink thing, but when I remembers what happened after I drunk the bubbles last night, my stomick turns sick at thought of it. Nor I ain't touched none from that day to this.

"Well, friend, this story's gettin' gassy, and I'd better puncture it.

"As I said before, I'm a freight-handler by trade, but what can a freight-handler do with arms like them? — Look at 'em! Honest, I'm ashamed of 'em. Any decent man would be.

"And he lied about this body. It's a reg'lar old granny; I can't get my feet wet without also gettin' sick. If he ain't sold my old 'un to some wheat-biscuit millionaire, I bet he's negotiatin' with boob about it; and he'll get a million for it, too. I tell you, a good healthy body's worth a million.

"It's hard deal, neighbor. I got a laborer's mind, but I got a perfessor's body. What's the use? I tried to work once, and didn't last ten minutes. I spent the thousand careful, but money can't last always, and I was soon on my uppers.

"Would you mind givin' us your name and address, neighbor? No, I knew you wouldn't. Thanks! I'll put it right down in this little book—see?

"And now, friend—ahem!—if you've a dollar, friend, that's not workin' for a week or so, I'll return it sure. I hate to ask you, friend, but you see how things is; I can't work at my reg'lar trade, and — ah! Thanks! I knew you was a gentleman the minute I seen you. Many, many thanks!"

Larry McGuff must have lost his little book. He has not returned the dollar, nor have I seen him, or heard of him since.

MEMORY AND FORGETFULNESS.

As down the dim-lit aisles of years long gone
  In devious ways my footsteps backward press,
There walk beside me, ever on and on,
  Two loved ones, Memory and Forgetfulness.

Forgetfulness puts from me quietly
  Rank brier and weed that line the path we stray;
While sweet-faced Memory plucks and keeps for me.
  The roses blossoming all along our way.

Eugene C. Dolson.

Over the Foot Lights

By Jerome Hart

SHE had a guardian, an old maid aunt from up-State, who, strange to say, did not object to the stage and was ambitious for her career there.

She backed the girl when she was "busted," and sent her generous gifts and odd sums of money when she wasn't.

In the spring, when the girl had broken down from overwork, the aunt came on and carried her off for a summer in Europe.

"Good old aunt!" cried Peggy's pals. And each sighed for an old-maid guardian just like her.

They had played in the same company during its record run in New York and had fallen in love. In the spring, when she went away, he continued in the production, which was still making good on Broadway, and found what comfort he could in writing to her and telling all who came his way that they were "engaged." He wanted to be married before she went to Europe, but she would not consent.

Now she was coming back and he was at the wharf to meet her. When she came off the gangplank, he took her in his arms and kissed her. He meant it, but it was stagey, and they were both dressed for the parts. He made a grand bow to aunty—who was plump and rosy and remarkably good-natured—and she said:

"Law! what checks you do wear, to be sure, sir! Now, get me through the customs and out of this crazy city as quick as you can. I'm going home on the twelve-ten train."

There was no dissuading the old lady. They took her in a taxi to the Grand Central and put her on her train, and she left them with characteristic mandates.

"Mind you take care of Peg, sir," she said to the man, as they settled her among her satchels. "And if she don't get to be leading lady pretty soon, she'd better leave and be married. The stage is all right if a girl is getting on, but if she ain't, get married, I say."

They laughed, and blushed.

Then they went to Bergere's for luncheon. Sitting opposite each other over one of the little side-tables against the mirrored wall, they looked and talked their full, as lovers will.

"There's no hurry, Chimmie," the woman insisted. "You can't get a rise out of me by playing on my feelings. Chuck it! We got plenty of time."

"But will you marry me some day?" he begged wistfully.

"Sure thing!" she declared. "If you'll leave me alone long enough. And no fuss and feathers for mine when I do do it, you bet. It's got to be when I'm in the humor. I'll tell you when I am that, pin on my little gray bonnet, and run round the corner with you. It'll be all over in a minute, then, Chimmie, me boy. But nixie for mine till I'm good and ready."

The man drew a fatuous sigh.

"But you will some time, Peggy?" he cried eagerly. "You will? I can wait! Gad! you're worth waiting for!"

They took a taxi up Fifth Avenue and round Central Park. It was a day for extravagances. Then, he brought her back to her boarding-house, a theatrical haunt within easy walking distance of the Great White Way.

"Well, so-long, Peggy," he said, holding her hands at the door. "I know you want to unpack and say howdy to the girls. The whole chorus is stopping here. I'm going over to the club to see Bunchy. Call me when you're ready, and we'll have dinner together."

The girl ran lightly up the shabby stairs, whistling her cat-call as she went. Here and there doors opened, and every kind of female in various stages of *dishabille* rushed out to greet her.

"Peggy! you darling old dub!"

The bare walls echoed with their cries.

Her roommate had a speaking part in Chimmie's company. She was sewing on a new costume when Peggy burst in upon her. They hugged and squealed, as women will, and exchanged a hundred or more breathless questions.

"Chimmie said you were coming, but he kept it under his lid when! And, of course, you wouldn't send us word, else we'd all been on the pier to meet you! Gee! I'm glad to see you! Got a job, Peg?"

"You bet! Chimmie had it fixed for me before I got here. Same old place in the front row."

The other sighed.

"Chimmie's a good thing," she said pensively, taking up her needle again. "He—he sticks, don't he?"

Peggy took off her hat and gloves and threw them upon the bed.

"Does he?" she laughed, with a satisfied air. Then she began to unstrap her suit-case.

"Heaven knows when my trunks will come!" she said. "But Chimmie told the property woman to have me fixed for tonight. Got a lot of gowns coming in. Had them made in Paris. Aunt Robbins is the goods! Well, say, how is everything, anyway?"

"Oh! the same!— Yes, you can have that drawer and the one beneath. I haven't time to clean them out, Peggy; this darned dress has got to be done! Dump them there! Sure thing— Yes, everything's the same. Got a new ingénue, and she's a regular frost. Some of the chorus has been changed, and the understudy has upholstered her hair. Chimmie—"

"Yes?" said Peggy.

Her partner smiled.

"Chimmie has mooned about you all summer! And he never took out one of us girls! I asked him to buy me a soda one night, and he said he had to get back and write to you. Ain't that the limit? And say, the leading lady's been making a grandstand play for him!

"Nothing has been too good for Chimmie, and everybody knows she's dead stuck on him. He has been giving her the frozen face right along, but last week—"

She stopped and shrugged her shoulders.

"I'm glad you've came back, Peg," she said.

Peggy went on shaking out her things from the suit-case and folding and hanging them away.

"Ah, she's dead welcome to him, if she can get him!" she sneered. "Is she as big a stiff as ever, Bill?"

So they chattered on.

That night, Peggy came off with the opening chorus, and found Miss Fox, the leading woman, talking to Chimmie. The chorus responded to an encore, and another encore, and still another encore, and Chimmie and Miss Fox were talking still.

As Peggy came out last time, Chimmie hooked his arm in Peggy's and held her captive.

"We've just been talking about Mrs. Humphreys's small girl," the star said sweetly. "Such a winsome youngster, and a born little actress. Don't you adore children, Miss Robbins?"

"I detest them!" Peggy cried promptly and emphatically.

The star's eyes flew wide and plainly said: "Fie! Shame upon you!" and Peggy felt Chimmie start involuntarily and clutch her arm.

"You can't mean that!" cried Miss Fox. "Surely, a woman—"

"Yes, I do!" cried Peggy recklessly. "What right has an actress with a child?"

"Oh, I rather agree with you there," said Miss Fox. "But surely a home and motherhood are to be preferred to the stage!" She smiled at them both, and at Chimmie last.

"Rats!" said Miss Peggy. "The stage for mine! Nix on the kids!"

Having once started on such an expression of opinion, and being met with unveiled disapproval by Miss Fox and Chimmie himself, Peggy was not the girl to back down or keep silent on the subject.

"Of course I hate kids!" she said to Chimmie.

"Do you, Peggy?" he said soberly.

"It's such rot!" cried Miss Robbins. "Can you imagine any woman wanting to give up any part of her spotlight to a little brat?"

Chimmie said little.

"Of course, an actress—" he would begin apologetically; then, he would smoke meditatively, silently.

"What's the matter with Chimmie?" Billie said to her one day when Peggy was making up in their corner of the dressing-room. "Has he got the pip?"

"Ah, I don't know!" mumbled Peggy.

"You'd better look out!" warned her chum. "Miss Fox is after Chimmie the whole blessed time! Now she's talking about making him her leading man in the new show, when this goes out on the road, and you know there's no chorus in that new show! Where'll you come in?"

"She can have him if she wants him!" Peggy answered sulkily. "He ain't the only pebble on the beach!"

Then she threw things about on her table, and couldn't find her eyebrow-pencil, and was late for her call.

"See here, if I catch you in here again I'll box your ears! Do you hear?" cried Peggy.

Mrs. Humphreys's little girl had come to the matinée with her mother, and being a curious little miss, was getting into all kinds of trouble. She had pulled something from Peggy's table in the dressing-room, and Peggy turned on her in a rage.

"I'll box your ears!" repeated Peggy.

It was between the acts, and the little room was full. Big-eyed girls turned about and smiled, and some one tittered. The child felt herself the center of attraction—and stuck out her tongue at Peggy.

Mrs. Humphreys's small girl had never had her ears boxed so thoroughly, and she ran howling into the wings to find her mother. Miss Fox rushed from her dressing-room at the screams, men and women looked out, and there was much confusion.

"She says Miss Robbins struck her!" Miss Fox cried to Chimmie. "It doesn't seem possible! The little lamb, I will not have a thing like that repeated in my company!"

"You're in wrong, Peg," Chimmie protested to her. "The child is a favorite with Miss Fox, and you've raised an awful fuss."

"I don't care," said Peggy. "She's a bold young monkey, and I'll push her little face in, if she doesn't keep out of that dressing-room."

Mrs. Humphreys's angel child was afraid of Miss Robbins, so she kept out of harm's way thereafter.

But the die had been cast, and Peggy was in disfavor with a good part of the company, who kotowed to Miss Fox. Chimmie took Peggy home nights after the performance, as of old, and they dined and lunched together, though not as often as before; but a constraint had sprung up. Chimmie no longer urged marriage; indeed, he never spoke of it.

On Sunday afternoons he occasionally accepted Miss Fox's invitation and went to her up-town flat for tea, and was made "homey" and comfortable there. Billie couldn't get her roommate to say anything about it. She sulked for a week or two, then a stage-door Johnnie, who had actually gained unqualified approval from Peggy's Aunt Robbins, was smiled upon and permitted to take out Peggy and Billie, and perhaps one or two others, in his auto and to dinner and supper.

Chimmie stepped back without a protest.

"I'm sick of this place," Peggy said to Billie, throwing her shoe across their room. "I've written aunty to come and live in a hotel with me. I told her I was sick. I am! You needn't laugh!"

"I know," sighed sympathetic Billie. "If you only get Chimmie—"

"Shut up!" hissed bad-tempered Peggy.

Aunty came, protesting vigorously against staying any length of time in "crazy" New York; but she was devoted to Peggy.

They took an apartment in a quiet hotel farther up-town; and because Peggy was tired of the Johnnie, and did not wish to accept Chimmie's escort at night, the good-natured old aunt came to the theater with her and sat, a little bored, in the wings or out in front.

"How do you do, sir?" she said to Chimmie, quite as though she knew nothing about the state of his engagement with her niece. "You look very much better on the stage than off—without them checks you wear."

Poor Chimmie, who was in a sad frame of mind himself, hung about her chair and tried to talk easily, until Miss Fox came and carried him off on some pretext or other.

The nights lengthened into weeks, and the company played on to still crowded houses. Part of it was rehearsing a new play, with Miss Fox as star and Chimmie leading man; and the chorus wondered when they'd have to leave little old New York for the weary road.

"You bet it can't come too soon," growled Peggy. "I'm so dead sick of Broadway and this darned town, I could die."

"So be I," sighed her aunt. "And I swan I'm afraid I'll pass in my checks if we don't get out of it pretty quick."

But she wouldn't leave her Peggy, whose frame of mind had not failed to catch the old lady's understanding and sympathy.

"I ain't so sure about the stage being a good thing for girls," she confided to Billie. "If Peggy don't get to be leading lady pretty soon, I'll take her off. A home's a right good place for a woman. You take my word. Law, if it hadn't been for Bull Run, I'd 'a' had a different kind of a home myself!"

Mrs. Humphreys brought her small daughter to the evening performance now and then. Miss Fox liked to have the child in her dressing-room; and she was a great playmate of Chimmie's.

She was spoiled. The only spot she failed to visit on her round of mischief and prying was the greenroom in which Peggy had her corner. Peggy scowled when she saw the babe, and it must be confessed that the child made fantastic faces behind her enemy's back.

She was into mischief that night she caught fire. It was in the middle of the second act, and Peggy had slipped off the stage and was going back, to get a headache tablet.

All at once, the door of Miss Fox's dressing-room burst open and the child came shrieking and tumbling out, Miss Fox's black maid after her.

Her little white skirt was all ablaze. She missed her footing and fell headlong down the stairs, at Peggy's feet. She lay, stunned, and the flames enveloped her.

Peggy stood gasping and motionless.

The cries of the black girl brought a stage hand quickly to the scene. He was putting out the fire, rolling the child and beating her with his coat and his hands. "Fire! fire!" from the wings had done its work; the asbestos curtain had been rung down, and in a few seconds the entire company was coming madly from the stage and into the wings.

All was crying and confusion; and still Peggy crouched against the walls, her hands to her cheeks, her eyes glued to the little heap.

Miss Fox pushed through the mob and flung herself upon the child.

"My darling! My darling!" she screamed. "Oh! what happened! What happened!"

"I had t' git in from the back, when I heard the yells," explained the stage-hand. "It took a little time."

Miss Fox spied her maid above.

"You did nothing! you devil!" she shrieked.

Her quick eye swept away, and took in Peggy standing alone.

"And you!" she choked. "You let her burn!"

"I couldn't move," explained Peggy simply, and a murmur ran through the crowd.

It did not occur to her to say anything else, though no one, not even the stage-hand, could have said that she did not come off with the other actors.

"Here's a doctor!" cried the manager, and weeping Mrs. Humphreys picked up her little daughter and followed the physician into a near room, the company falling back for her.

Most of the assembly took Miss Fox's stand against Peggy.

"She let the kid burn!" they cried. "Gee! do you remember the day she pounded the poor little devil?"

They moved away from Peggy.

"I—I couldn't stir!" she whispered, and looked up at the man nearest her.

It was Chimmie.

"Of course you couldn't, Peg!" he cried kindly, patting her rigid shoulder. "It paralyzes one, don't it? I know!"

And he went to find out if he could help the sufferer.

Later the show was resumed. Mrs. Humphreys's child was not badly burned. She was bruised from her tumble and may have swallowed some smoke, but there was no danger.

Miss Fox refused to speak to Peggy, and there were other quarters in which the girl was treated as a criminal and a would-be murderess! She did not go on again that night.

Next morning she was at the old boarding-house near the Great White Way, and had routed Billie from sleep.

"I'm out looking for another job," she said. "I can't stay in that show, even if Miss Fox don't have me fired! Everybody thinks I didn't want to save that kid! Believe me, I was cemented to the floor! I couldn't wiggle my little finger!"

"Of course you couldn't," said loyal Billie. "You should have heard Chimmie lay it out to Miss Fox."

"Ch—Chimmie?" said Peggy weakly.

"Chimmie!" cried the other. "Miss Fox's so stuck on herself, she's a porous plaster! She gives me a pain! Last night after you lit out, she had Chimmie in a corner and was raving to beat the band!

"If there's anything on earth you ain't, Peggy Robbins, I'd like to hear it! You ain't fit to be alive! Maybe Chimmie wasn't sore! He pitched right into her, and told her straight from the shoulder—Say, Peg, are you and Chimmie engaged yet?"

"I don't know whether we are or not!" snapped Peggy. "Let her have him, the big stiff!"

Billie got out of bed.

"Well, Chimmie warmed up to your praises all right, all right! The way he talked last night, all the burning kids from here to Chicago weren't worth the risk of a single hair of your head! If you don't marry him soon, he's going to blow his brains out! That was his spiel!"

"Ah, he hasn't opened his peep about that to me for some time!" snarled Peggy.

She sat brooding.

"Well, if I were in your shoes—"

Billie tugged herself into her clothes, and left Peggy to finish out the sentence for herself.

Some time afterward Peggy lifted her head.

"I haven't got a white dress to my name," she began. "Have you got a white dress I could borrow if I wanted it?"

Billie stared at her.

"What on earth do you want with a white dress this weather?" she demanded.

"Oh, I don't know," sighed Peggy, dragging her feet to the window.

Billie meditated.

"Sure thing you can have anything I own," she said. "Though what the dickens— I got a cream muslin with red poppies in it."

"And a hat?"

"Poppies, too. You must remember the get-up. I wore it in the garden scene last spring. It's pretty rocky, Peg, but it's the nearest white I got."

"It would do," said Peggy. "I'm going down to telephone."

She left Billie staring, open-mouthed.

Peggy went to the nearest telephone booth and got Chimmie on the wire at his club.

"You believe I couldn't do anything for that kid last night, don't you, Chimmie?" she asked.

"Sure thing, kid!" he cried. "Now, don't you think about that again, old girl! I'd have been rooted to the spot myself if I'd been there! And I'm glad you couldn't move. Good Lord! if you had caught fire, too!"

Peggy trembled.

"You know, Chimmie, I told you that day I came back from Europe that if I married you, I'd have to make up my mind in a hurry and get it done quick?"

"I've never given up hope, Peg," he answered.

"I can make up my mind now," she fluttered.

"You don't mean it, Peg!" cried out the man.

"I—I'm over at Billie's," Peggy said, and hung up.

She called her aunt.

"I guess I'll marry Chimmie this morning," she said to her.

"Good gracious!" gasped the old lady. "What'll you wear?"

"That don't matter!" giggled Peggy.

"Well, it's your wedding!" sighed her aunt. "If you ain't leading lady by this

time, you ought to get married! And I allus said Chimmie was the man—in spite of them checks he wears! Will I have to get dressed now, and come down to the wedding?"

"Oh, no, aunt!"

"Very well," sighed the comfortable spinster. "I'm jest going to get a shampoo now. I'll be ready with my blessing when you come back!"

Peggy burst in upon Billie again, and began tearing off her belt.

"Where's the dress, Bill?" she cried.

Billie dragged the frock out of a clothes-press, and the hat from a box. They were showy things, and none the fresher for wear.

"You see the hat's silk," said Billie, "so it will do for this weather. Though what the deuce—"

The other girl was beaming.

"They're all right!" she cried, throwing off her shirt-waist and skirt and getting into the dress. "What'll you wear?"

"I? Why, where in the name of Mike are we going?"

"I think we're going to be married, and you can be my bridesmaid," said Peggy. "I called Chimmie and told him I was here!"

"Good Heavens!" gasped her pal. But she got out a polka-dot silk and commenced to dress in high glee.

Chimmie tore over in incredibly short time, and he and his friend Bunchy were announced at this point.

"Tell 'em to wait!" shouted Peggy.

They threw things about in their gleeful haste.

"'Something old and something new,'" crowed Billie. "The dress and the hat are old enough, but here's a brand new pair of silk stockings. Ah, quit your kidding! They're your wedding presents, so put them on and shut up!

"Miss Fox may be over here any minute after Chimmie! 'Something borrowed.' Go on! Borrow more! There's a drawer full of truck behind you! Help yourself! 'Something blue.' My garters! Put them on quick! Gee! ain't it a pipe to get married!"

The girls left the room a tumbled mass of disorder, but they went forth dressed to attract all eyes.

Peggy's big hat with its wealth of glowing blossoms heightened the warm color in her cheeks, and her pony-coat could not hide the red and cream of her flimsy, borrowed bridal gown. She carried a lot of jingling silver things on her wrist, and her little high-heeled pumps showed the very red silk of her new hose between them and her flirting skirts.

Chimmie was standing and trembling in the front hall. Miss Peggy went to him.

"You may marry me, if you want to!" she said pertly.

Chimmie just grasped her hands and kept shaking them and staring at her!

"We must get the license, first," said businesslike Bunchy.

They had a taxi outside, and the four got into it, Chimmie still holding on to Peggy's hands. He stuttered when he tried to speak, and everybody was moved.

It was all over—license-getting and brief ceremony in the little church around the corner—before one o'clock. The four parted at the church door.

"I got to finish a dress for to-night's performance," Billie said, "so I mustn't lose another minute!"

Bunchy said he'd take her home. And Chimmie and Peggy rode away alone to their wedding luncheon.

They sought the same little table for two, over against the mirrored side-hall, and looked and looked—as lovers will.

"It's all over, Peggy," he breathed.

"I feel a bit dizzy now," she confessed.

"I've got you at last!" he said.

He lighted a cigarette with shaking fingers, and gave his order in a thick voice.

When the waiter had gone, she laughed nervously and shivered.

"That thing last night — I — I was a coward!"

"Nonsense! Thank the Lord you didn't touch the child! If anything had happened to you—"

He shivered, too.

"But lately—Miss Fox—"

"My heart's been down in my boots!" said Chimmie.

Then they both laughed inordinately.

"Her flat was homey," Chimmie confessed. "I used to go there and sit and think about you all the time."

He gazed at her long and adoringly.

"I go to a lot of flats," he said. "A bunch of the fellows are married. I've envied them since I fell in love with you, and lately, it's been worse. But, of course, you like the stage best.

"I'm glad we're in the same company! If—if I go on with this new play we're rehearsing, you won't want to go out with the old, will you?"

"Why, I don't know," said she, looking down.

"I want to live as you wish, old girl," he went on. "You can play. I've ambitions for you, too. If you can't get a part here, I'll chuck the new stunt and go out with this show when it goes. We can live in hotels on the road.

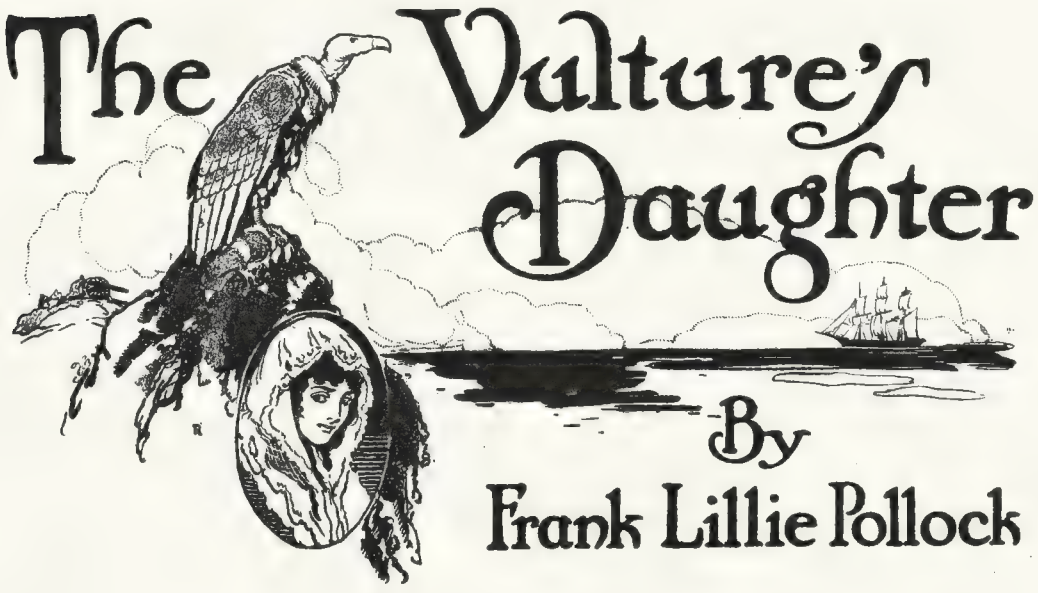
"Anything, so we're together! I don't suppose couples off the stage are any happier than we are! That—that flat idea has appealed to me. But I don't know—"

His eyes sought the ash-tray, and his voice trailed away into a whisper.

She leaned over the table and put both her hands on his.

"Chimmie," she said softly, "I'm not so dead stuck on the footlights as I pretend! A—a homey flat, and little ones playing about, and—and a wife who stays right there—

"We—we'll be that kind of a married couple any time you say the word, Chimmie, dear!"



CHAPTER I.

PARADISE LOST.

HE had no particular liking for amorous adventures, and certainly not when they presented themselves anonymously.

Yet there seemed a hint of more than that in the letter, and the mystery of the thing attracted him.

He sat flipping the paper dubiously; it was perfumed with something like an odor of the tropics, and was written in a large, careless hand. She wrote:

I have an important communication to make to Mr. Herbert Fairfax, and I earnestly hope that he will call on me to-night between ten and eleven o'clock. He should come in a closed cab, and make sure that he is not followed. Ring Chambers's bell. When he arrives he will learn my name, but for the present he will remember me as

PARADISE LOST.

03 East Thirty-Sixth Street.

The signature made the writer's identity almost certain. It was only yesterday that a handsome and handsomely dressed woman had approached him at the Fifth Avenue bookstore, where he was temporarily in charge of the foreign department.

She had asked for a Spanish translation of Milton's "Paradise Lost," and the novelty of the request had fixed the incident in his mind. He had been unable to furnish the book; she had insisted on his searching the shelves again, and finally he had spoken Spanish to her, guessing her nationality.

It was not difficult to guess, for she was almost the conventional type of that race—large, dark, with fine eyes in a strong, if somewhat heavy, face. She was a fine figure of a woman, in the penumbra of thirty—one way or the other—and during the short conversation they held, she spoke Spanish with a strong Mexican accent.

Fairfax recognized the accent well, for he had learned his own Spanish in Mexico, where he had spent three unprofitable years in the attempt to realize his fortune.

Brought up in a South Carolina village, he had set himself at twenty to the task of making half a million dollars — quickly. He was not exactly mercenary or materialistic, but he had early grasped the fact that most of the things of this world cost money.

It was the things he wanted, not the money; it was leisure, freedom, power. His ambition, his ideal of life, was to buy an immense estate somewhere and live on it like a landed gentleman, in a world of his own, founding a family, independent of everything. To gain this, he was prepared to sacrifice ten years of his life to money-making. Paraphrasing Napoleon, he said that at thirty he would be either dead or a demimillionaire.

For he counted that half a million dollars was the least that would do him, and he believed that it could be made most easily either on the tropical frontiers or in a great city.

By way of preparation, he studied French, German, telegraphy, mining engineering, electricity, surveying, and the construction of gas-engines, and he familiarized himself with a table showing the fluctuations of the stock-market for the last twenty years. Then he went to Mexico as clerk of a coffee plantation.

He was surprised to find that life ran as monotonously in Mexico as in South Carolina. After a year of the coffee plantation he went inland to the mines, and finally spent a third year in Mexico City. Then he left the tropics for New York, with a few hundred dollars, a considerably increased experience of life, and a hunger for a white man's country.

He had not progressed far toward his half million; but New York was the city of vast fortunes and desperate chances, and he was ready to take them all.

But the chances, somehow, did not show themselves. It was appalling to find how many other men in New York were after a half million, and how little demand there was for a young man who understood French, Spanish, telegraphy, and the construction of gas-engines, and was willing to take chances.

He picked up a living somehow. He did one thing and another, but his few hundred dollars melted. That fall times had been especially hard with him, and he had been glad of a temporary position at Wellenstein's, where they wanted a clerk speaking French and Spanish to take charge of their department of foreign books during the holiday rush.

So it was Mexico, after all, that had brought him into acquaintance with the Mexican lady. What possible communication of importance could she have to make to him? None, Fairfax firmly believed. What then, could she want with him? The obvious, vulgar hypothesis came into his mind, and he shrugged his shoulders.

A flitting fancy pictured some wealthy woman who had been captivated by him, and wished to endow him with her hand and fortune. Even modest men sometimes have such visions, as wealthy women do sometimes have such fancies, but neither are often durable.

Fairfax smiled at himself and sat down, lighting a pipe. He had had a long day at the bookstore, and he had come home tired. He would pass a quiet evening with a book, and he glanced at himself in the mirror with the thought that his was not the face to catch hearts on the fly, as it were.

He was a good-looking young fellow, nevertheless, tall and well set up, with dark hair, a bronzed, strong-featured face. The only very striking feature about him, however, was the fact that his eyes did not match, one being gray and the other brown —a peculiarity that made him easily recognized, but which was a source of no satisfaction to him.

On reflection, he felt ashamed that he had even thought of anything so foolish as accepting the anonymous invitation. And yet the woman had not looked like an adventuress.

Fairfax smoked and read for an hour, with half his mind occupied by the mysterious letter. The lure of mystery is hard for twenty-six to resist. And she had said that it was of great importance.

Still, decidedly, he would not go. He read on, and then mechanically looked at his watch. It was almost ten o'clock. In

five minutes more he jumped up angrily and began to change his clothes.

He thought for a moment of dress clothes, but rebelled at the idea of taking so much trouble. He compromised on a black coat and tie, hurried out of the house—he lived on Ninety-Second Street—and walked toward the Subway station.

He had no intention of following the directions of "Paradise Lost," so far as to spend two or three dollars in cab-fares. He left the Subway at the Grand Central stop, walked down to Thirty-Sixth Street, and then eastward to the number given.

It proved to be a tall, brownstone-fronted house, bearing the discreetly gold-lettered inscription, "Excalibur Chambers." A double row of shining brass plates in the entrance-hall bore bell-pushes and the names of tenants; but this appeared to be a house devoted to expensive bachelor apartments, and Fairfax hesitated.

He verified the number again. There was no mistake, and, in fact, among the cards in the hall he noticed one engraved "R. C. Chambers." Determined now to see the thing through, he pressed the button.

The door clicked open almost immediately, and he began to climb the softly cushioned stairs, looking at the doors on each landing. But it was not until he came to the top flat that he found the name-plate he sought.

He had scarcely seen it, he had not had time to knock, when the door opened, and a woman, dressed for the street, appeared.

His guess had been accurate; it was his Mexican of the bookstore.

"Ah, you didn't do as I said. You didn't come in a cab. Imprudent! But come in, quickly," she said, almost under her breath.

CHAPTER II.

THE MAN-TRAP.

"WAS the cab so important, then?" Fairfax asked with assumed carelessness, as he stepped inside.

She closed and locked the door carefully after him, drew aside a heavy curtain at the other end of the tiny, square hall, and revealed a room beyond that seemed filled with the very essence of quiet coziness and comfort. A low fire burned in an open grate; a tall, shaded lamp diffused a faintly crimson glow.

"Important? You can hardly guess—" said the Mexican, and broke off, regarding the young man with an intent and searching gaze.

She wore a long coat of dark velvet, hat, and gloves, as if she were about to go out, or had just come in. In that obscured light she was strikingly beautiful, but just then she was clearly unprepared with any of the arts of that charm. She seemed agitated, hurried, alert.

He was surprised at it; he had expected a very different sort of reception; and he was almost more surprised at her surroundings.

For this was certainly a man's quarters; a rich odor of good tobacco pervaded the place; a pair of dogskin gloves lay on the writing-desk, beside a rack of pipes and an ash-tray. The furniture was heavy and serviceable, leather and oak, with no trace of any feminine knickknacks.

A carved bookcase was packed with volumes; a glass-faced cellaret showed bottles and glasses; a small piano occupied a corner. It was apparently the apartment of a wealthy bachelor with epicurean and cultivated tastes.

"Dear lady," said the Carolinian gallantly, "I was in such haste to reach you that I had no time to look for cabs."

She made a slight, protesting gesture.

"I didn't ask you to come here to pay me compliments. Have you any idea why I wanted to see you?"

"Not the slightest. Nor have I any idea what I am to call you," he ventured.

"Call me—simply *señora. Y hablemos Español,*" she responded. "Let us talk in Spanish. You speak like a Mexican, and it sounds homelike to me, for I was born in Vera Cruz. I wanted to see you because—really, I don't know how to tell you."

"It was charming of you, whatever the reason," Fairfax suggested.

"Leave it at that, then. I said I had something important to tell you. Suppose that was a fiction. You have a very pleasant manner, Mr. Herbert Fairfax—yes, and a handsome face. Is it any wonder that a woman should ask you to pass a pleasant evening with her? What shall we talk about? About Mexico? About yourself? What are your ambitions?"

"Their name is legion. There are a great many of them," said Fairfax; "but my only one at this moment is to make myself agreeable to you."

So it was an amorous adventure that he had blundered into, after all, he reflected; and he thought that he would stay half an hour and then escape, never to return. But there was a concealed agitation in the woman's manner that somehow awaked a responsive tremor in him.

"Spoken like a *caballero!*" cried the *señora.* "But your ambitions are—will you smoke?"

She rose and began to rummage through the writing-desk till she found a box of cigarettes. The displaced papers, he noticed, also revealed a tiny pearl-mounted revolver.

"Are you armed?" she questioned him suddenly.

"You forget we're not in Mexico. One doesn't carry weapons for an evening call in New York."

"No? You won't smoke? Shall I play for you, then?"

She tore off her gloves, went abruptly to the piano, and began to perform a piece of music in an erratic and flourishing style.

Fairfax's ideas had undergone half a dozen changes in the last ten minutes. He was curious, uneasy, anxious to be gone, and anxious to see it through at the same time. He rose suddenly and went to the piano.

"Look here, *señora,*" he spoke through the music, "what does all this mean, after all? What am I here for?"

She dropped her hands on the keys with a crash and looked up at him. For two or three seconds they gazed unyieldingly into one another's eyes.

"Would you be willing to leave New York?" she said at last.

"I might, if it were worth my while."

"Would it be worth your while to save your life?"

"Why—yes. But you'd have to show me that New York was likely to kill me," he answered, startled.

"Take my word for it. Don't lose an hour. You are running great risks here."

"But—" Fairfax began, and was interrupted by the silvery trilling of the electric bell in the hallway.

"Ah, *Dios!*" cried the woman. "It's too late. But, no—there's a stair going up to the roof. You can hide there. You can't go down—you would meet them. You must not be found here."

She thrust his hat into his hand and pushed him toward the door.

"I don't see where the danger lies. I certainly won't hide on the stairs," said Fairfax indignantly. "Or, by Jove," he added suspiciously, "if this is a trap—"

"It is—it is! But, no—it's too late now. Whatever happens will be your own fault."

Footsteps were coming up the last flight of stairs; voices spoke on the landing. A key rattled in the lock; the door opened, and the portière was drawn aside sharply.

The man who entered first was a tall and dark-faced gentleman, with something soldierlike in his bearing, his lean countenance, and his close-cut mustache. He was expensively and fashionably dressed; he had a stick under his arm, and he paused at the entrance, looking from one occupant of the room to the other in cold astonishment.

"Perhaps you will kindly explain, madam," he said at last, "who you are and what you are doing in my rooms. Also who this young gentleman may be."

"We know well enough who this young gentleman is!" cried another voice, as a second man pushed into the room. "Caught at last, my friend!" he continued, exultantly looking Fairfax over. "Well, you'll get what's coming to you now."

This was a burly, heavily built fellow, with a red face that carried a scar like an old cut from the corner of the mouth to the chin. He wore a silk hat on the back of his head, and a white shirt-front showed under his Inverness coat.

The *señora* huddled in a chair, and made no reply, and Fairfax had the difficult task of explaining.

"I'm sorry I've intruded," he began. "There seems to have been some kind of a mistake—"

"No mistake!" the red-faced man cried. "You knew well enough what to expect when you saw us. Will you take it standing up or lying down, you cur?"

With that he drew some implement of metal and leather from his pocket and proceeded to adjust it over his gloved right hand.

Fairfax perceived then that it was a particularly atrocious apparatus of brass knuckles, with spikes half an inch long.

The fellow advanced toward Fairfax, balancing himself on his toes like a boxer, his armed fist raised, his eyes glittering with cruelty and blood-lust. The military-looking man had at first made a protesting gesture, and then stood aside, watching the drama with tense interest.

To Fairfax it seemed as if it were some horrible nightmare, from which he must presently awake. He was tall and strong himself; he was ready to fight for his life, but a numb paralysis held him. He was incapable of a movement of defense.

It was the woman who broke the terrible spell. With a bound she reached the table, snatched the little revolver, and thrust it into Fairfax's hand.

"Don't you see he means to kill you?" she screamed.

The pistol seemed to go off of itself. Through the puff of smoke Fairfax saw his antagonist stagger, throwing up his hands. One side of his face had turned suddenly crimson, and he fell heavily on his back on the carpet.

Fairfax dropped the weapon with a cry of horror. The man drew up his feet convulsively, rolled over on his face, and lay still.

"He's done for. We must get out of this quick!" exclaimed the other stranger. And he seized Fairfax by the arm and dragged him to the door.

In his last agonized glance at the room Fairfax saw that the woman had somehow disappeared.

CHAPTER III.

THE FUGITIVES.

FAIRFAX allowed himself to be led, dazed and horror-stricken at what he had done, and vaguely amazed at this action on the part of one of his enemies.

When they reached the landing there was a noise of slamming doors below, of excited voices, and of hurrying people. The man swore under his breath.

"The shot's been heard. We can't go that way. Here, there's a stairway to the roof. Come after me."

He precipitated himself up a small staircase that indeed communicated with the flat roof by means of a scuttle.

The icy winter air struck bracingly in Fairfax's face as he climbed out on the graveled surface of the roof. His mind, which had been a mere sodden mass of horror and bewilderment, cleared suddenly.

"Hold on," he exclaimed, clutching his companion's arm, "where are you going to take me?"

"Do you want to stop and argue, with the rope on both our necks?" cried the man savagely. "I'm taking you where you'll be safe. Where? I don't know myself. First thing is to get as far from here as we can."

He began to run along the roof.

Fairfax could do nothing but follow, though he half regretted that he had ever run away. It would have been better to have stood his ground, to have explained to the police, but it seemed madness now to go back.

Along the roof they ran in the darkness, clambering over parapets and dodging under clothes-lines, till the stranger suddenly stopped and peered over the edge. The iron ladder of a fire-escape projected over the parapet, and he instantly began to clamber down it with great agility.

That hundred-foot descent was for Fairfax another nightmare of that terrible evening. The iron ladders were icy, the wind whistled savagely round him, and he was mortally afraid at every moment that he would lose his hold and drop into darkness that looked infinitely deep.

But he accomplished it somehow, and found himself standing breathless beside his conductor in a small, paved back yard, surrounded by a high board fence. A sort of narrow tunnel, however, gave an open passageway to the street, and they reached the sidewalk at last, where the stranger at once struck out eastward.

But during his descent Fairfax had resolved to go no farther. He had been in no way to blame, and he would face the consequences.

"Look here," he said, stopping suddenly, "I'm going back."

The other man also stopped, turned, and regarded him closely.

"Tired of living, are you?" he said. "You want to sit in the death-chair?"

"It was pure self-defense," Fairfax protested angrily.

"Maybe; but how'll you prove it? You'll never see that woman again, and you may bet that you'll never get me into a court-room, not to save anybody's life. Where are your witnesses? What were you doing in my rooms, anyway? If you don't hang, it'll be a life sentence at the best."

The Southerner was staggered by this side of the case, which seemed only too terribly real. Imprisonment? He would prefer death. And he thought suddenly of the certain incarceration while he awaited his trial, the disgrace, the scandal. It was too

much to endure. He was clear of it now, and he would keep clear.

"What do you propose to do?" he asked anxiously.

"First, not to stand here talking," and he led the way eastward again at a smart pace. "Next, to get out of New York. Then we'll consider. Have you got any money on you?"

"A couple of dollars."

"Luckily I've got plenty — at least, enough to see us through."

"But you're in no danger. You've done nothing!" Fairfax exclaimed.

"No danger? I took the man home with me. He was seen with me. Can I say that I found two strangers in my rooms who killed him and then disappeared? A nice, credible tale for a jury. Besides, I've got reasons for not wanting to appear in court in any capacity. And I won't."

"By the way, what's your name?" Fairfax asked.

The man glanced aside at him and smiled rather grimly.

"That's hardly a question to ask under present circumstances. However, you probably saw the name on the door. You can call me Chambers if you like."

They had reached Third Avenue by this time, and they took the Elevated southward. Chambers heaved a sigh of relief as they boarded the train.

"Now that we're away from the place, we're safe for a while," he whispered. "The door is locked, and nobody'll find him for two or three days."

But the words evoked in Fairfax's mind a vision anew of the fallen man's blood-stained face—a picture which seemed burned into his imagination. He looked at the people in the car with new and hostile eyes.

Henceforth all men were his enemies—an outlaw's fear would hang perpetually over his head. Surrender would be almost better than that, he thought, but the idea of the prison, even more than of the gallows, cowed him.

They left the train at the City Hall, and hurried across to the ferry-docks on the East River. At the railway station Chambers bought two tickets for Malaga, New Jersey. It was the first train that would leave.

It left in ten minutes, in fact, and a certain amount of weight left Fairfax's mind when the lights of New York were behind them. The train was almost empty, and no one had paid the slightest attention to them.

"It's a pity it happened just now," Chambers remarked. "It's a bad time for killing men. There's been a good deal of it in the city lately, and they've set themselves to stop it. There wouldn't be much chance for you if you came up now."

He proceeded to recount gruesome instances of murders committed and detected, passing on to the details of different forms of capital punishment.

"For Heaven's sake, stop it!" Fairfax cried at last.

"Your nerves are getting shaky? Must not allow that, Fairfax," Chambers observed, looking him critically over.

"How do you know my name?" the young man demanded.

"I don't know it. But that's what you said your name was."

Fairfax was sure that he had said nothing of the sort.

"What was the name of the man who—that other man?" he asked.

"John Nelson. Why?"

"And that woman? Who was she?"

"I've seen her before—that's all. You should know her best."

"But what's it all about?" Fairfax entreated. "Why did she want me? Why did she bring me to your rooms? Why did this Nelson want to kill me? Who did he take me for?"

"Now you're asking too much. I can't answer you," replied Chambers; and at that moment the train slowed for a small station and stopped.

"Come, we get out here," he added.

"This isn't Malaga already, is it?"

"Of course not. You don't think I'd go to the place I took the ticket for? From here we take the train across to — come along."

They waited half an hour, and then took a train for Hackettstown, getting off again before they reached that point. They tramped across two miles of country roads in the darkness to Markdale, where they took still another train.

"What's to be the end of this, anyhow?" queried Fairfax wearily.

"Why, after we've dodged and doubled enough to throw the hounds off the scent, I thought we'd make for Philadelphia and lie quiet there for a while," Chambers explained. "Then we'd better take a steamer and get out of the country—or, rather, two

steamers, both of them traveling in opposite directions."

"Separate?" Fairfax said, startled.

"Safer. You can get along alone all right."

"Certainly," Fairfax answered, but his heart sank.

This man, at first an enemy, had come to seem a friend, an ally, almost a brother in the common peril and fatigue of their flight. It was terrible to think of what life would be alone in the midst of a hostile world.

He never quite remembered the details of their movements that night. It melted afterward into a confused recollection of trains, wayside stations, overheated waiting-rooms, and frosty outside air.

They changed their destination till he lost all sense of direction, and finally, in the gray dawn, exhausted and mud-splashed, they boarded a train which Chambers said would take them to Philadelphia.

At a refreshment-station Chambers went out, and returned with a cup of hot coffee and a sandwich.

"I've had something," he observed. "Here, take this. You can go to sleep after it, and I'll waken you before we strike the town."

Fairfax ate and drank gladly, and almost immediately after he had finished his eyes grew heavy. Weird and terrible visions danced through his brain, changing, melting, growing dimmer, till they faded into a cloud of blackness that seemed to press him down.

With a last effort of his will, he seemed to see that Chambers was watching him closely, but suspicion and memory passed away together into heavy sleep.

CHAPTER IV.

PARADISE FOUND.

FAIRFAX awoke with a heavy sense of indefinable trouble, to find himself in a place that he had never seen before in his life.

He was in a sumptuous bed, in a strange and gorgeous chamber.

His head reposed on fine linen and lace; the coverlet was of silk, and the foot of the bedstead curved in heavy, glittering brass, ornamented with silver.

The room appeared to be a large one, softly carpeted, luxuriously furnished, and through a half-open door at the bed-foot he caught a glimpse of the marble and silver fittings of a bath.

He raised his head to contemplate these wonders, and sank back again, dizzy and sick. At the same time, the memory of the past night rolled back full over him, and he groaned aloud.

With an effort he sat up, and then slipped out of bed. His watch lay on a small table beside him, and he was amazed to see that it marked half past two—evidently of the afternoon, since a ray of sunshine flickered through the closed curtains.

He pulled them aside. A flood of sun poured in. He was high up in a great building, set in lawns and shrubbery, where people moved here and there in knots.

He heard the panting of motor-cars. Blue mountains rose in the distance, and the caressing warmth of the sun told him that he was far out of the latitude of New York.

But where was he?

Bewildered, alarmed, he began to hurry into his clothing, which he found had been neatly brushed, pressed, and folded. He was half dressed when he caught sight of an engraved square of card on the table, which had the somewhat startling effect of a revelation.

It was a luncheon menu, elaborately printed and gorgeously conceived, and it bore the ornate heading:

BEECHWOODS,
Blue River **Virginia**

Fairfax had heard of Beechwoods, like every one else. It is half a hotel, half a sanatorium, founded by an ingenious Baltimore physician who comprehended the value of the medieval practise of bleeding.

He grasped the great fact that there are many people in America who feel the want of something almost prohibitive in price, and who are prepared to value such a thing accordingly. He made his rates, therefore, almost prohibitive; Fairfax had heard that the minimum charge was a thousand dollars a week, but this may have been an exaggeration. Anyhow, the wisdom of his reasoning appeared at once.

From its opening, Beechwoods was filled with people with apoplectic bank-accounts, and in the second season it had a waiting-list good for half a million dollars.

In his wildest dreams of wealth Fairfax had never aspired to be a guest at such a

place, and he did not wish to be one now. How had he come there? His memory was clear, but there was a perfect blank, a void of deep blackness since the time when he had drunk the coffee on the train.

A conviction, becoming a certainty, rose in him that he had been drugged.

But why? And who had brought him here? And where was Chambers? And, above all, who was paying the bill, at the rate of a thousand dollars a week?

His head ached anew with the effort to find an answer to these questions, and as soon as he had finished his toilet he hurried out to look for a solution elsewhere.

After wandering for some time through marble halls he found his way at last to the office, where he asked for the manager. He was not in. The head clerk, then?

"I really don't quite understand how I come to be in this hotel," Fairfax explained candidly to this official. "I had no intention of—"

"It's all right. Your friend brought you in early this morning. You were ill, it seems, and hardly knew what was going on. You'll be all right soon."

"Yes, but—the bill—" Fairfax hesitated, embarrassed under the supercilious regard of the clerk.

"Your bill is paid in advance."

"Really? And for how long?"

"Why — ah, excuse me," and the clerk hurried off, leaving his guest not much enlightened, but considerably relieved.

He wandered into the lobby, which was a vast sun-parlor, and found New York newspapers of that morning lying about. With a palpitating heart he skimmed through them, but found no mention of any shooting affray on Thirty-Sixth Street. Yet, as Chambers had said, the door was locked, and the body might not be found for several days.

He went out to the wide verandas where Dives filled a hundred rocking-chairs, and, feeling unequal to this society, he strayed off into the grounds in the concealment of the shrubbery. The grass was green; hard, white roads intersected the beautiful grounds; equestrians, carriages, and automobiles passed him, but he scarcely saw any of these things.

He had seen violence in Mexico, but he had never had a man's blood on his hands; nor had he ever guessed the horror of it. By moments he felt that he would rather surrender himself, but fear restrained him.

And, complicating his terror and regret, was the stupefying improbability that Chambers should have smuggled him into this millionaires' hotel and then disappeared; and he had a tormenting sense of being somehow entangled in the web of a greater mystery than he could fathom.

He did not walk far; he still felt weak and faint. The drug, whatever it was that he had taken, seemed to have shaken his very roots of life. He sat down under a tree presently and spent the rest of the afternoon there in alternating agonies of perplexity, doubt, and resolution.

He crawled back to the hotel about the dinner-hour, and mustered his courage sufficiently to enter the dining-room. The place was gay with soft lights, jewels and evening dresses; and Fairfax, acutely conscious of his irregular appearance, edged away to the most obscure table he could find. He seemed to detect an ironical air in the waiter, who presently served him with so much ceremony.

He finished his uneasy meal as hastily as he could, retreated to his room, and locked himself in. He went to bed early that night —but not to sleep.

The next day's newspapers were still void of any reference to his deed. He roamed away from the hotel again to spend a solitary day in the most secluded spot he could find, and with continued immunity there began to come a gleam of hope.

It might be that the man was not dead. But all his recollections—and they were clear as diamond-points—told him that he must have been terribly wounded at the least. There was no comfort in that hypothesis.

To be sure, he could hardly be better hidden than at present. The Beechwoods was the last place where a fugitive from justice would be sought.

He was sumptuously lodged, magnificently fed; it occurred to him that the fortune he had tried so hard to gain could have given him no more. But there were considerations that prevented him from sinking too deep into the lap of luxury.

In the course of that day and of the next he became more than ever conscious of the smugly veiled derision with which the employees of the hotel treated him, from the clerk who handed him his key to the waiter who brought him his breakfast.

He could hardly wonder at it; he must have cut a queer figure among these plu-

tocratic people who wore three or four different sets of attire every day.

Fairfax had only one suit, one hat, one pair of shoes, all none the better for a good deal of wear and considerably the worse by his flight by night. He had not so much as a clean collar or handkerchief, and his total cash in hand was a dollar and sixty cents —rather less than one of the Beechwoods servants would expect for a single tip.

At first he suffered for lack of tobacco. Nothing less than twenty-five-cent cigars were for sale at the hotel. He might have had a box of them put on the bill; but he was afraid to ask for it, and he finally stole down to the little village by the railway and bought a cob-pipe and a package of tobacco. This he concealed under the root of a tree in the grounds, and went there daily to smoke.

Away to the west rose the blue, serrated line of the Alleghanies, smoky and dim in the afternoons, clear-cut against the sunsets. Beyond that line lay the wild Kentucky hills, the home of moonshiners, feudsmen, outlaws.

The mountains were not so far distant; he could reach them in a couple of days' tramping, and he pictured himself taking refuge in their fastnesses, living the life of an outlaw, consorting with man-killers, fugitives from justice, enemies of the law—the only men who henceforth could be his friends.

The idea grew upon him, but he lacked means to carry it out. He needed a rifle, ammunition, a camp outfit. He thought dimly of beginning his career by holding up one of the Beechwoods guests and thus securing the necessary capital.

He might as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb; but, after all, this was only a flicker of fancy. He could not seriously bring himself to consider such a deed.

On the evening of the fourth day he walked back to the hotel from his accustomed lounging-place with a determination to do something. He would get away from this gilded prison at once; at the best, the situation could not endure much longer. But, if he had only known it, it was ended already.

When he presented himself at the hotel desk the clerk looked at him with a silent, insolent interrogation.

"My key," said Fairfax.

"Your room's wanted," the clerk replied.

Fairfax was suddenly indignant.

"Have you another for me?" he demanded.

"Don't know. You'll have to see the manager," and the clerk turned indifferently away.

It was over then.

Fairfax had known it must come, but he was stunned by its suddenness.

He turned away with a feeling of desolation and homelessness, wandered blindly into the lobby, and stopped with a gasp and a shock.

Standing by one of the pillars, smoking a cigarette, was the red-faced man he had shot in New York.

He had not espied the young Carolinian, and, after the first daze of amazement, Fairfax approached him, fearful that he had made a mistake.

There was no mistake. It was the man in every detail, even to the pale scar from the mouth's corner to the chin. And the face bore no other scar, not so much as a scratch.

Trembling now with excitement and rising anger, Fairfax stepped up to him and seized him by the arm.

"What is all this trickery about? You are the man who can tell me what it means!" he exclaimed hoarsely.

The red-faced man looked at him with a perfectly expressionless countenance, and raised his hand to remove his cigarette—the hand that Fairfax had last seen ornamented with a spiked knuckle-duster.

"Take your hands off me, sir!" he said. "I don't know what you're talking about. I don't know you."

"But I know you, John Nelson!" Fairfax cried. "And you claimed to know me the other day in New York. I'll have it out of you now. What has all this been about? Open your mouth, and be quick!"

His voice was so loud that several persons looked up in surprise, and two or three groups turned toward them. Nelson took him by the arm and led him to a window.

"What do you want?" he asked sharply.

"I want an explanation. And I want to go back to New York."

"Take this," and he pulled a twenty-dollar bill from his pocket and thrust it into Fairfax's hand. "And now get out of here," he added with contempt. "You had the chance to make your everlasting fortune, and you didn't have the sand."

(To be continued.)

"That Plain Little Woman"

By
Etta Anthony Baker

WHEN Mrs. Reginald Carter met Mrs. Van Tromp on the avenue that Friday morning she bowed shyly.

They had been members of the same church for years, but she was simply "that plain little woman in fifty-six," while the latter was *the* Mrs. Van Tromp, the arbiter in matters social for the entire feminine portion of the congregation.

Much to her surprise, Mrs. Van Tromp greeted her with effusive cordiality.

"So glad to see you, Mrs.—er—Carter, so glad! Why are the women of our church not more social, I wonder? It is a matter to be deeply regretted."

The great lady shook her head deprecatingly.

"Er—by the way—I am having a few friends in for luncheon to-day—oh, quite informal, I assure you. Just ladies of the church. Won't you join us? Do!"

Mrs. Carter accepted, blissfully ignorant of telephoned regrets and a distracted hostess. The Sapphira embroidery of the invitation was unnecessary; the fact that elaborate luncheons are not, as a rule, arranged on the very day of the function itself, was beyond the ken of the little woman's experience.

Several eyebrows lifted inquiringly as the dowdy brown dress joined the modish gowns about the handsome table later.

"Any port in a storm!" the hostess explained lightly to the women nearest her. "I was reduced to thirteen and despair."

Mrs. Carter sat through the luncheon in a maze of delight and longing, oblivious to everything but the artistic perfection before her. A vision of her own table flashed into her mind—set in the kitchen for convenience, a broken-nosed vinegar-cruet, its customary center-piece, save on occasions of rare extravagance when a huge-pressed glass bottle of catsup shed its refulgent glow over the coarse cloth and heavy dishes.

She shivered with distaste, her very soul crying out for beautiful china and cut glass, silver and fine linen. Its yearning fairly overwhelmed her.

Scraps of sprightly conversation about the dainty table dully penetrated her absorption. These delicately assertive women seemed to be dissatisfied with life. Their husbands, their homes, their children failed to complete the sum of their happiness.

Vote! Why should they want to vote—they, with their silver and fine linen, their flowerlike apparel? She never thought of such a thing.

Reginald understood the situation; he knew how the country should be managed; he was fully capable of casting all the ballots necessary to represent the Carter family. Vote! Certainly not.

The thought of Reginald—tall, straight,

and handsome — was as balm to her soul. Not a woman at the table could boast of a husband to compare with him. But, oh, the joy of presiding over such a table! Of dispensing such dainties to one's own guests!

She fairly ached with this new longing, so foreign to her usual narrow content, where Reginald's comfort, Reginald's pleasure, Reginald's approval bounded her horizon.

All the way home she racked her brain in the effort to find some means of earning money. She remembered a puzzle she had solved the year before. Its five dollars' reward had resulted in a "stunning" cane for Reginald.

Even before she removed her hat, she began an eager search of newspapers and periodicals—a fruitless task, however, as all her diligence failed to reveal any unsolved puzzles with pecuniary attachments. She was about to give up in despair, when a modest, little advertisement, tucked away in the corner of a page, caught her eye:

BOOKS! BOOKS! BOOKS!

Highest Prices Paid for Old Volumes if Valuable and in Good Condition.

A. C. WEATHERBY,
113 Goodall St.

Old volumes!

Those yellowed books of her great-grandfather's, piled up in the storeroom, fairly danced before her eyes. She had clung to them all these years—years when the question annually recurrent to the modern flat-dweller was not: "Shall we move this spring?" but "Where shall we move this spring?"

When the Carters took possession of their present quarters, Reginald had urged her to present the books to that refuge for white elephants, the Salvation Army — to burn them, or to throw them away; but an unsuspected vein of sentiment had restrained her, and so seldom did she disregard his slightest wish that he smiled indulgently and let the matter drop. But if only they were "valuable"!

Early the next morning she sought out A. C. Weatherby, and entered the tiny store with a bulky package under each arm, hope rampant upon her shield. The dealer was cautious, noncommittal, his manner nicely calculated to dampen undue enthusiasm and smite aggressive hopes. The market was overstocked, he assured her; no call whatever for second-hand books; business going to the dogs!

But a closer inspection of her burden changed the pessimistic tenor of his speech. He even forgot his rôle so far as to become eager with a bookworm's itching eagerness, to hold, to handle, to possess! Half an hour later Mrs. Carter emerged breathless, radiant with hope still rampant, but crowned with a golden crown.

One hundred dollars!

It seemed too good to be true. She pinched herself sharply, but found that the beautiful dream remained—a blessed reality!

She decided to spend one-fourth of her unexpected wealth upon household treasures; the rest, of course, for Reginald. She seemed to tread upon air as she turned toward the shopping district.

Twenty-five dollars to spend as she pleased, she who never spent twenty-five cents upon herself unnecessarily. No wonder the faded eyes fairly glowed with color, and the usually dragging walk assumed a jaunty springiness.

That night, tired but exalted after her blissful experiences, she counted up her day's expenditures. The result, startling though it was, failed to subdue her exultation. The stipulated one-fourth had fairly melted before her fiery onslaught.

A second fourth had followed. Then the joy of buying—buying—a joy never before known in her pitifully meager existence—had taken possession of her.

The third fourth went the way of its brother fractions in short order; and before the day of delight was done *all* had gone.

No, not all! The handsome linen centerpiece was a special bargain, "marked down to ninety-eight cents"; just two cents remained of all that magnificent sum. But, oh, how amply had it fulfilled its mission!

The copper pennies, rattling about accusingly in the purse before her, brought not even one qualm of regret for their lonely estate.

For Mrs. Carter the next few days were the red-letter days of a whole colorless existence.

The unwrapping and arranging of her treasures, the writing and despatching of the invitations, and the preparations for the luncheon were labors of love—fitting prelude to the perfect bliss which followed when

the handsomely gowned ladies gathered about the dainty table over which she herself presided. To few is given such complete realization of a cherished dream.

No matter what life should hold for her later, nothing could rob her of this memory. She acknowledged this inwardly, with a sigh of supreme content, that night as she awaited her husband's appearance, after it was all over.

"Your supper's ready," she said softly when Mr. Carter, handsome as ever in his well-fitted gray suit, entered by the rear door and greeted her in his usual affectionate manner. She watched him adoringly while he ate the creamy soup, then calmly disposed of both lamb chops, as a matter of course.

She had grown into the habit of refusing any special dainty on the plea of "not caring for it." Her housekeeping allowance was limited — Reginald's personal adornment was, with her, the first consideration always.

"Well, little woman," he began in caressing tones when the first insistent demands of the inner man had been appeased, "nectar and ambrosia couldn't hold a candle to this soup! Something new, isn't it?"

"Yes, dear," she answered, her dull-blue eyes lighting up joyfully at his praise of her efforts. "I made it like that I had at the luncheon."

"Ho, the luncheon—the wonderful luncheon! The great and only luncheon!" he echoed genially. "If this"—pointing to his empty soup-plate—"is a result, I hope you'll go often.

"By the way," he continued, in his soft voice, "there must have been a party on our floor."

He indicated the flat across the hall by a wave of his white hand. Both voice and hand were part of his stock in trade, as the best floor-walker in one of the most exclusive shops on the avenue.

"There was," Mrs. Carter replied simply, a great wave of joy sweeping over her as she recalled her day.

She had left the table and was ironing away busily to make up for lost time, keeping a watchful eye open to her husband's needs, however.

"Guess they were blowing themselves," he went on. "I met a whole crowd of our church women as I came up-stairs. Heard one of them say it was 'perfectly lovely!' and another one answered: 'I never imagined for a moment that she lived in such style, did you?'"

Mrs. Carter murmured some indistinct reply. Her husband cared little for comment, and as a listener she was invaluable.

She went on with her work methodically, only glancing at him from time to time with a look of mute admiration in her faded eyes. To think that she, with no beauty, no wit, no style, had been chosen by such a man as this! The wonder of it came over her afresh. Life was wonderfully rich!

There was much of the primitive about Mrs. Carter. The assertive, power-grasping, ballot-demanding woman of the day was an enigma to her. If she had lived a few thousand years earlier she could not have bowed to her lord in more abject submission.

Had he playfully shied his stone ax toward her, she would have sought temporary retirement in the innermost recesses of the family cave, and peered forth from her rocky shelter with eyes still worshipful, awaiting her master's change of mood.

Mr. Carter resorted to winning smiles and caressing tones instead of a battle-ax, but the worship was none the less sincere. He talked away, while finishing his supper, giving her the experiences of his day. That was his greatest charm—selfish as he was, he was as entertaining to his wife as to others. No wonder she worshiped him!

"I sold those books," she remarked suddenly, without preamble of any kind.

"Books?" he echoed. "What books?"

"The ones that belonged to great-grandfather. I got a hundred dollars for them."

"A hundred dollars!" he repeated, jumping to his feet in his excitement. "A hundred dollars! By George, little woman, that's dandy! I'm mighty glad we held on to them. It don't pay to be wasteful, now, does it?"

His self-congratulatory tone assumed all credit for the absence of unremunerative improvidence.

He sat down again, and, producing paper and pencil, figured away busily for a few moments.

"Yes, sir," he announced finally in jubilant tones, "it will just about cover it. I've been really needing an evening suit and a long, light overcoat for some time. You know, I'm invited about a good bit, to the different lodges, and such things count for a whole lot. I guess I can set them off all right," he added complacently, as he

gave a satisfied smirk at the comely image in the cheap little mirror over the table.

"I'll order them to-morrow at Hibbard's. There'll be enough for new patent leathers and some extra waistcoats and ties. A fellow can't have too much of that sort of furnishing to be well dressed.

"You might get a new pair of gloves, too. I think there'll be enough left. I'll take the money now, before I forget it," he finished carelessly, as if in all his selfish life he had ever forgotten anything which would conduce to his personal comfort or adornment!

Mrs. Carter flinched involuntarily, then the thought of her treasures upheld her. She even smiled, in a milk-and-watery way, as she slowly opened her shabby purse and deposited its contents in his outstretched hand.

"Now, look here, Sophie," he began reproachfully as he looked at the two cents, "stop fooling. If you don't want me to have it, just say so." It was the formula which never failed to "fetch" her. "Come on, now, and give me the rest of it."

"That's all," she said evenly.

"All?" His tone was the acme of disbelief. "All! What did you do with the rest of it?"

"I spent it."

It was a statement, pure and simple, with no tinge of defiance or challenge in it. The exaltation of her day was still upon her.

"Spent it?" Oh, the concentrated incredulity. "Spent it! All—that—money! That was extra! Extra!" he shouted fiercely. "That wasn't for necessities! Do you hear?"

"I know it," she replied simply. "I didn't get necessities."

"Then, what—"

She interrupted him by pointing toward the unused dining-room.

He stalked to the door, threw it open, and started in, but found his way blocked by a large pictured screen which spread its folds flauntingly at the entrance to the room, where no barrier was wont to stand. Thrusting it aside impatiently, he stopped short in bewilderment so great that it was some moments before the details of the scene impressed themselves upon his numbed senses.

All three gas-burners flared at him in open defiance. The table beneath them presented an artistic disarray of lace-edged doilies, glittering glass and china, fairly dazzling to his eyes.

In the center a green vase incrusted with silver filagree held a great bunch of pretty carnations.

"One dollar a dozen!" he muttered unconsciously. He knew, because he always purchased a flower for his buttonhole.

His eyes wandered to the lighted candelabra which graced either side of the festive board, their shades a delicate green with silver filagree covers, while a fairy-like glass finger-bowl with tracing of gold marked each place, twelve in all.

The side-table behind the screen bore a burden of bouillon-cups, and lunch-plates with unmistakable remnants of fried chicken adhering to them; while on the table itself a handful of salted almonds in a fancy glass nappy, an olive or two in the tray, even a tiny wedge of varicolored ice-cream wasting its melting sweetness upon the unappreciative atmosphere, all attested to the wanton luxury of the feast.

His hands clenched as the faint odor of sherry assailed his nostrils and a solitary maraschino cherry winked at him derisively from one of the frappé-glasses. It was the last straw, that cherry, for his camel of restraint.

Those women—twelve weaker vessels—gorging their pampered appetites upon viands purchased with the price of his clothes, his comforts!

In a flash the civilization of centuries slipped away. The smooth, easy-going man of to-day became a primitive creature who hurled himself upon this record of his wife's intemperance with a snort of baffled fury, smashing finger-bowls, frappé-glasses, and plates; tearing doilies and center-pieces to shreds; sending the flower-holder crashing among the bouillon-cups on the side-table, and grinding the remnants of the food beneath his heel.

Only when the unoffending screen had been reduced to its lowest terms, a mass of kindling wood with a few rags of pictured burlap to tell the tale of its former glory, was the outraged devil within him appeased. Then the primitive creature with passion unrestrained gave way to an abashed man of to-day who viewed the havoc he had wrought with dazed dismay.

A spark of anger flared in Mrs. Carter's eyes, flamed an instant, then smoldered and went out.

She made one furtive grab, and rescued a finger-bowl which, by some fortuitous circumstance, had managed to weather the

first stress of the storm. Then she viewed the demolition of her treasures with all the aloofness of an apparently unconcerned spectator.

As the work of destruction approached its finish she carried the rescued bowl to the kitchen, and placed it carefully upon a shelf behind some mason jars. Then she quietly resumed her task of putting geometrically correct creases in a pair of pale-gray trousers.

She had had her day—its memory remained undimmed. After all, some women had no trousers to crease: there was consolation in the thought! Her orgy of bliss and his of passion were past.

She was once more the satisfied, adoring wife; he the caressing-voiced, complacent object of her adoration.

Life in the Carter flat settled into its customary unruffled calm, the luncheon and its aftermath alike forgotten episodes that left no faintest ripple on its smooth, unruffled surface.

Honest Money

By William Heyliger

A MAN came down the street hurriedly, and entered the vestibule of the last house in the row. He had not been running, but as he struck a match his breath came in quick, panting gasps.

The flame traveled down the row of brass letter-boxes and stopped at the name "Manning." The man pushed the black button of the electric bell, softly, cautiously.

After a while guarded footsteps sounded on the dark stairs of the flat-house. The door opened noiselessly.

"Carl?" questioned the man in the hall.

"Yes," whispered the midnight caller. "The grand jury returned indictments."

"Were—were warrants—"

"No. Judge Davis had gone home when the indictments were found. Warrants will issue in the morning."

There was a pause. Finally the caller asked:

"How's the wife, Jim?"

"Bad."

"Of course we can beat this. They can't prove a thing."

Manning shook his head.

"It's the wife. I don't want her to know. She's always thought me straight. That's her now."

Through the hall came the faint sound of a racking cough.

"I'm going up, Carl."

When he entered the sick-room the woman in the bed stirred wearily.

"I'm—going, Jim."

He caught her hand as though to pull her back along the path of life.

"Nonsense," he said huskily. "The doctor says you're doing fine. Doesn't he, nurse?"

The nurse echoed the lie. The sick woman turned her head away and made no reply.

After a time she seemed to sleep. Before Manning's mind loomed the coming of men with a warrant for his arrest. His wife had thought him honest—

He shivered.

Other men had done, time after time, what he had done, and no harm had come to them from the law. There was the committee that had built the Hall of Records. He had heard Bogart boast that he had collected thirty thousand dollars from the contractors.

Manning swallowed hard. He had gone on the committee that was to build the new court-house with joy in his heart. And this was the end. His committee had been decent, too. They had demanded only fifteen thousand dollars each on a three-million-dollar job.

He had planned to quit politics when the year ended. He had promised to take his wife, always frail, out into the country. And now she was sick—and a jury had indicted him as a grafter.

He couldn't understand it. The court-house was the fairest building ever erected in the county. Yet no indictments had followed the erection of the other buildings. There was the insane asylum, the—

The sick woman stirred.

Instantly he was at the bedside with a glass of water. The expected coughing did not come. He put down the glass and turned to the nurse.

"You're tired. Get some sleep. I'll sit up with her to-night. If I need you, I'll call."

In the dead silence of the sick-room Manning stared into space. The minutes raced away noisily.

Of course they could beat it. Carl Handler was a shrewd lawyer; he had advised them at every step. Everything was covered. But the arrest would shock his wife, and she was in no condition to receive such a blow.

For weeks the newspapers had been full of court-house graft, and his name had been published in bold, black type. When the first stories appeared he told her that they had been printed for political effect, and that the charges were not true. She had mussed his hair, had kissed him, and had asked no questions.

Suddenly, without knowing why, he glanced toward the bed. His wife's eyes were full on him; he felt that she had been watching him for a long time.

"I want to talk to you, Jim," she said.

"The doctor said you mustn't—"

"It doesn't matter now, Jim."

He brought over a chair and sat near her, taking one thin, white hand in his brown grasp. Into her eyes and cheeks and voice had come a sudden brightness and strength that would have caused a doctor fear. Manning, looking at her, noted the change and thought that she was getting better.

"Jim," she said at last, "you didn't steal any money on the court-house, did you?"

The sweat broke out on his forehead.

"Why—why do you ask?" he whispered.

"I don't know, Jim. I fear sometimes that everything has not been right. It's a foolish fear, isn't it, Jim? You won't be angry, Jim, will you? Will you, Jim?"

"No," was all he said.

"I've been thinking a lot since I've been sick," she went on. "Before you got on the building committee we were always pinched here and there. Just a little, Jim; but we had to figure before I could buy a dress or you buy a suit of clothes. And since you got on the committee— Jim! It's honest money, isn't it?"

His lips were trembling.

"Honest money, Mary," he said. "Honest money—" His voice trailed off into a ghastly silence.

"I'm glad," she said. "I was a little bit afraid. You'll forgive me, Jim, won't you? But lately you've had so much money to spend, more than ever before, and I could have anything I wanted. And you planned a little house in the country. I—I don't think I'll ever go to the little house, Jim; and I won't see the porch all our own, and the roses—"

"Mary!" he cried.

She tried to pat his hand, but her fingers only twitched.

"I wondered where—where you got the money, Jim."

"From the stock market," he said huskily. "I borrowed, and played a tip. I didn't tell you. I thought you'd worry. It was honest money, Mary; honest money, I say."

He realized with a start that he was talking wildly in his efforts to convince her. The ticking of the clock drew his attention for an instant. Four o'clock. Five more hours and they'd come for him—

"Honest money," he repeated dully.

"I'm glad, Jim."

The voice was growing weaker, but he did not notice.

"'I would never have been happy with unclean money. I never complained all these years when politics took you away from me nights. I knew you were clean. And I knew that the people wanted you, and trusted you and sent you to represent them because they, too, knew that you were clean. So I let you go, and I've been proud of you, Jim."

He sat there silent with his lips twitching. The shaded sick-room lamp sputtered and then flared up again in fitful, shadowy illumination. He wet his lips.

"And then came the newspaper stories," and now her voice was so weak that he had to strain forward to hear. "They were awful stories, Jim—"

"Poor little girl!" he soothed.

"And I sat here days and cried over them."

"You never told me," he groaned. "You never told me."

"I did not want to worry you. Sometimes I thought that perhaps— Forgive me, Jim. But it would have killed me, Jim—me that thought so much of you, thought you so clean—to have found you dirty as the rest of them."

Manning bit his lips until he drew blood, and did not seem to feel the pain.

"Stop, Mary," he pleaded. "You'll exhaust yourself. The doctor said—"

"I meant to speak to you when I got better, Jim. But I—I don't think that I'm going to get better. If you had been—been weak, Jim, I'd have made you give it back. Then we'd have moved away, and been honest again—and clean."

The last word died away in a choking gasp. He stroked her hair in a dazed sort of way.

"Honest money," she said faintly. "Honest money. I'm—happy—Jim."

He leaned forward quickly, stared into her face, and then sprang to his feet.

"Nurse!" he called brokenly. "Nurse!"

In the broad light of day James Manning walked into the court-house with the steps of a broken man. Employees in the different county offices watched him in silence as he passed through the marble corridors.

"He's hit hard," they said. "Knox and Smellie don't seem to be worried."

Slowly Manning went into Part I of the Criminal Court. Knox and Smellie, his companions on the building committee, nodded a jovial welcome.

"Only five thousand dollars' bail," said Knox. "We've got your bondsman here."

Manning made no reply. With the eyes of the court-room on him, he stood at last before Judge Davis. Carl Handler, the lawyer, stood beside him.

"I have come—" began Manning.

"Mr. Manning surrenders," said Handler. "He has been indicted for malfeasance in office. We plead not guilty, and ask your honor that bail be fixed."

Manning raised his voice. It sounded strained and shrill in the silent court-room.

"If your honor please, I do not wish the advice of counsel. I will plead for myself."

A hum sounded in the room. Handler caught Manning by the arm.

"Are you crazy?" he demanded.

Manning shook him off.

"The grand jury," he said dully, "charges that I am a grafter. I plead guilty."

"Manning—" shouted Handler.

"I plead guilty, your honor."

In a dazed way Manning saw the smiles wiped from the faces of Knox and Smellie. He saw three newspaper reporters running for the nearest door. The court-room echoed a babel of excited voices.

He felt a hand touch his arm. He turned to find a court constable at his elbow. He had got the constable his job.

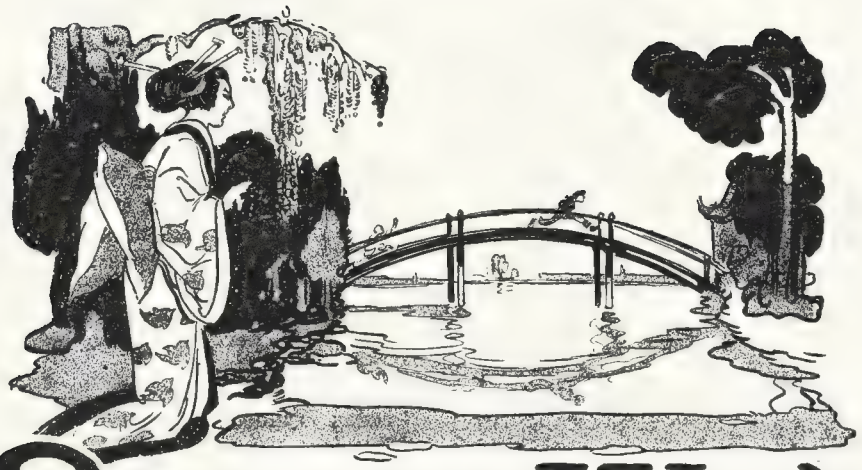
"I'm sorry, Jim," said the constable.

"I'm clean, Mary," murmured Manning brokenly, and bared his wrist for the chain handcuff.

CONSECRATION.

KNOWLEDGE, and power, and will supreme,
  Are but celestial tyranny,
Till they are consecrate by love,
  The essence of divinity.

William Johnson Fox.



Raising the Wind

By R. J. Pearsall

"A CHANCE to see the world" is what the recruiting officer calls it.

"Seeing the world through a port-hole" is the phrase sometimes employed by the ungrateful enlisted men, especially when they are classed—that is, when their shore liberty is taken away from them.

Jasper Kettles, private marine, wasn't classed; but he was broke, which is worse.

When one has money, jumping ship is always among the possibilities; but when one is broke—why, you've got to have the coin to even get a *sampan* to get you ashore.

And in Yokohama, of all places!

Kettles had always wanted to see Yokohama. He was seeing it now—he mused, standing on the deck of the U. S. S. Spray—but at long range.

He knitted his brows reflectively. A dollar or so was all he wanted, even a yen or a Mexican dollar would do. A little money goes a long way in Japan, but it's essential to have that little.

He was leaning over the rail, when a bluejacket approached him.

"Heard you had a watch to sell," the newcomer said.

"I certainly have," said Kettles eagerly. "A good one, gold-rolled case and seventeen-jewel movement, and all I want is ten yen."

"Let's see it."

Kettles pulled it out, openly confident, but inwardly shrinking.

"All that's the matter with it is that the hair-spring is out of place and the pinion broke. Dropped it the first night I came on board at Taku. It'll cost about a yen to fix."

But the bluejacket had lost interest in it.

"Oh, it isn't going, eh? Don't believe I want it."

He handed it back without looking at it. A watch that wouldn't run appeared to him about as useful as a ship that wouldn't float.

Desperately Kettles called him back; this was the sixth possible purchaser that had balked at the tickless watch.

"Say, look here; do a fellow a good turn, will you?"

"How?" with a look aside like a shying horse.

"I'll sell this watch for half what it's worth, but nobody wants a watch that won't run. Lend me the money to get it fixed."

The bluejacket started to refuse, money being pretty scarce on the ship at that time; but memories of his own broke days came to him, and he relented.

"Tell you what I'll do," he said. "You take it over and see what they'll stick you for fixing it. If it isn't more than two yen, leave it. I'll let you have the money."

To take it over wasn't so easy. A *sampan* ride costs ten sen, and ten sen was more than Kettles had. Kettles, however, had a friend, the third-class engineer, that ran the steam-launch; behold him, therefore, the next day, clad in *dungarees,* passing as the engineer's assistant and so making the trip ashore.

He ran into the first jewelry-shop he came to, left the watch, learning with delight that the repairs would cost a yen and a half, and beat it back to the launch, getting on board the ship just in time for dinner.

Now, gambling is prohibited on an American man-of-war. It is also prohibited in most American cities, still—

A poker game flourished the next day forward of the breakwater on the forecastle. Kettles, coming upon the group, saw with some trepidation his bluejacket friend sitting with a pile of chips before him. Fascinated, he stood behind him and watched the play; saw, with a sinking heart, the pile grow smaller with steady, persistent bad luck, until at last it vanished; saw his friend dig into his pocket for more money, fail to find any, and then rise and turn away.

Involuntarily Kettles's eyes met the bluejacket's. The latter stopped, and his face took on a sheepish expression.

"Well, I'll be eternally jiggered if I haven't gone and lost that money for your watch," he said. "Never thought about it; I swear I didn't. If I had— But you can get it somewhere else, can't you?"

"Oh, I guess so. It's up to me now, anyway. I've got to," replied Kettles, grinning; but at the same time he wasn't overconfident.

He didn't know of a single person of whom he could borrow; sailors and marines are the freest persons on earth with their money when they have any, but by the same token they don't have money for any long period after pay-day. And it was now nearing the end of the month.

The rest of the day Kettles spent in futile endeavors to borrow. All of his friends were broke, or so nearly so that the slightest touch would complete the process. One of them acknowledged the possession of twenty sen, and offered to split with Kettles. This offer Kettles refused with thanks, and then on second thought accepted. The ten sen would, at least, get him ashore.

By nightfall he had advanced no further toward recovery of his watch, and when he paid his *sampan* man and stepped onto the wharf his pockets were empty. It was not even clear to him how he was to get back to the ship. But one must take some chances. Coaling ship the next day, and the next day the last chance for liberty in Yokohama.

He didn't want to lose his watch. There was no two ways about it, he reflected, he simply had to get hold of it.

A rickshaw man tagged him persistently, curio pedlers pressed their wares upon him; but Kettles pushed them ungraciously aside. The repair-shop was not far from the wharf.

Kettles walked breezily in, greeted by bowing Japanese. He had determined upon his course.

He produced his ticket.

"You fixed my watch all right?" he inquired of the little, slant-eyed yellow proprietor.

"Yo, all samee, all lite," replied the Japanese.

Then he jabbered a meaningless lingo to his assistant. Kettles saw the latter fish for his watch among a string of others; he found it, and began to tinker on it.

"You wait," said the proprietor. "Plenty soon all lite."

Kettles wondered at this; the watch should have been repaired; but the delay gave him an opportunity.

"You want buy?" he said to the Jap. "How much you give me?"

The Jap shook his head while his smile widened.

"Me no want."

"Sell very cheap," said Kettles. "Bimeby you sell again. Make cumsha. How much you give?"

"I lose, I lose," cried the Jap, as if in despair at the prospect. "I pay you two yen. But I lose."

"Oh, you lose, all right, you yellow heathen," grunted Kettles. "Let's see it."

The assistant had finished with it; Kettles took it and stepped under the electric light to examine it. This move placed him nearer the door.

It was then that Kettles got in wrong.

He glanced out of the door. The crowd was dense, the street was dark. The fawning watchmaker was approaching. Kettles couldn't resist the temptation.

Out of the door he sprang and round the near-by corner, where he lost himself in a

jumble of rickshaws. The rickshaw coolies called to him, but he trusted his own legs best. He got away, all right; he could hear yelling and confusion behind him, but he distanced pursuit.

Yokohama's one principal business street is several miles long. Kettles emerged upon it again at quite a distance from the scene of his felonious exploit. Within a block he discovered another jeweler's shop. He entered, the urbane clerk kowtowed to him as before, the proprietor advanced to meet him.

"Want to buy a watch?" now inquired Kettles.

The Jap's smile was as pronounced as before, but his eagerness sensibly lessened.

"No want. Have got too many."

"Very cheap," insisted Kettles. "Very good watch."

He pulled it out and started to hand it to the Jap; but something about it seemed peculiar. He observed it more closely—and then checked a sudden, wild impulse to throw it through the windows. It had again stopped.

The Japanese saw it, too, and wouldn't even examine it; he shook his head, uttered voluble protestations of sorrow, and bowed Kettles out of the shop.

It was all plain now, why the assistant had tinkered with the watch after he had called for it, and why the jeweler had refused to give more than two yen for it. What was not plain was how he was going to get the yen-fifty he owed for the attempted repairs. For unless it was paid within the hour he knew the jeweler would go to the ship and make complaint. And then a summons before the mast and a summary court was all that he could expect.

Kettles shook the watch until it began to tick merrily. He held it in his hand until it stopped; it ran exactly three minutes. He passed a jewelry-shop, walked on a little way, took out the watch, shook it until it started and, still shaking it, approached the shop. He replaced it in his pocket as he entered, hurried up to the counter, pulled it out, and thrust it at the smiling Jap. "How much you give?" he asked.

"No want, no want."

"Oh, I know that," ejaculated Kettles disgustedly. "Sell cheap. Seven yen."

"No want. I lose. Seven yen? You sell for seven yen? All lite. I give you seven yen."

The Jap had examined the watch quickly, and now produced the money. Kettles took it and left without ceremony. He lost no time in putting distance between himself and the shop.

Back to the repair-shop in a jiffy! Really he owed nothing; the repairs had not been successful; but he knew that by forcibly making off with the watch he had put himself in the wrong. The proprietor was glad to see him, exceedingly so. He kowtowed even lower than before and his smile was broader.

"I am crazy—*fungla*," said Kettles, as he paid him. "Like all Americans."

The proprietor bowed again. Americans were also profitable people to deal with.

Kettles was now square with the world, and had five yen and a half in his pocket.

"'Tis a consummation devoutly to be thankful for," he mused. "It's not much; my watch was worth three times that, but—well, one can always buy a watch, but a chance to see Japan doesn't come so often. Let's see, it's too late to do anything to-night but go back to the ship. I'll come over day after to-morrow and see the town."

He bought a couple of drinks, paid his *sampan* fare back to the ship, and when he climbed up the gangway of the Spray had one lonesome five-yen bill tucked away in the watch-pocket of his trousers.

The next day they coaled ship. If ever you want to find a simile that will convey to an ex-naval man a sufficiently terrifying idea of the infernal regions, use that of coaling ship.

Make it by preference a warm, cloudless day, with a brisk wind blowing either fore or aft; have the coal nice and dry and powdery, so that the sweat and tears and dust and ocean spray will mix together and form a sticky, smarty substance that coats the skin and fills the nostrils and blinds the eyes; give the men wicker coal-baskets for tools; form them in line from the coal-barges up the side of the ship to the hatches of the bunkers; set them working and keep them going through eternity.

That is a picture for a modern Danté. That is the experience that Kettles, together with the rest of the crew of the Spray, underwent on the day following his adventure in Yokohama.

Eternity? Well, if you think fourteen hours of this isn't a pretty close approach to eternity, try it.

At nine o'clock at night, the ordeal over, Kettles, in company with certain others of

the crew, stood on the port side, 'midships, taking a bath. And while he applied the soap and worked it into a lather and rubbed it in and rinsed it off, and again soaped up, trying to rid his body of the grime, his heart was singing a pæan.

To-morrow he would go on liberty, explore Yokohama, and take a trip to Tokyo.

All day he had been planning the excursion, while he strained at the baskets of coal. Kettles was a bit of an explorer; the prospect of seeing a strange country filled him with anticipatory delight.

Satisfied at last with his bath, he prepared to don clean clothing. But first to dispose of those in which he had worked. They were old and worn, and he wasn't fond of scrubbing. He gathered them up and flung them down into the water.

He stepped back from the side, started to dress, and then, with a gasp, remembered. The five-yen bill was in the trousers that had gone overboard.

He sprang to the rail and peered over.

The water gleamed fantastically in the moonlight; something floated on the surface, quite a distance from the side; it was drifting away on the current.

Kettles didn't hesitate. He sprang upon the rail and dived downward and outward. He came up close to the floating object. A few strokes brought him to it; he grasped it; it was a pair of trousers.

Elated, he slowly won his way against the current back to the gangway.

There he met the master-at-arms, who demanded with emphasis to know what he meant by doing such a fool stunt. Kettles explained, and, explaining, ran his hand into the pocket where he had kept the fiver.

It was empty. With an accession of haste he examined the other pockets. They were likewise empty. Then the awful truth dawned upon him.

He had rescued somebody else's trousers.

Well, it was too late now. He strained his eyes over the surface of the water; it was innocent of floating garments. He threw the trousers he held in his hand back into the bay, and turned disgustedly up the gangplank.

Kettles slept soundly that night; he was too nearly exhausted to worry over his loss. But it cannot be said that he was especially cheerful the next day.

Ordinarily the loss of five yen would have meant little to him, but in this particular case the sum loomed up like a small fortune, and all the jibes and jokes of his shipmates failed to chase away his gloom.

The next morning the ship weighed anchor for Kobe. Kettles and a brother marine leaned over the rail waiting for the call of "quarterdeck guard," while the bluejackets made the ship ready for sea.

Below the Japanese *sampans* raked the bottom of the sea for refuse.

"I suppose it'll be the same down there," said Kettles. "Everybody broke, no money and no chance of getting any. Blamed if I'm not getting tired of it. They say Kobe is a fine place for a liberty, too. If I only had that five yen—"

His sentence trailed off, and he stared down into a *sampan* below. The *sampan* man was hauling in his drag.

On a hook hung a pair of trousers. The Spray had already started to move.

Kettles hadn't a moment to spare. He sprang over the rail and shot down into the water. A few swift strokes took him to the *sampan;* he snatched the trousers from the bewildered Jap, thrust his fingers into the watch-pocket, pulled out a five-yen bill, limp, faded, and water-soaked, but still five yen; sprang again into the water, and struck out for the ship's side.

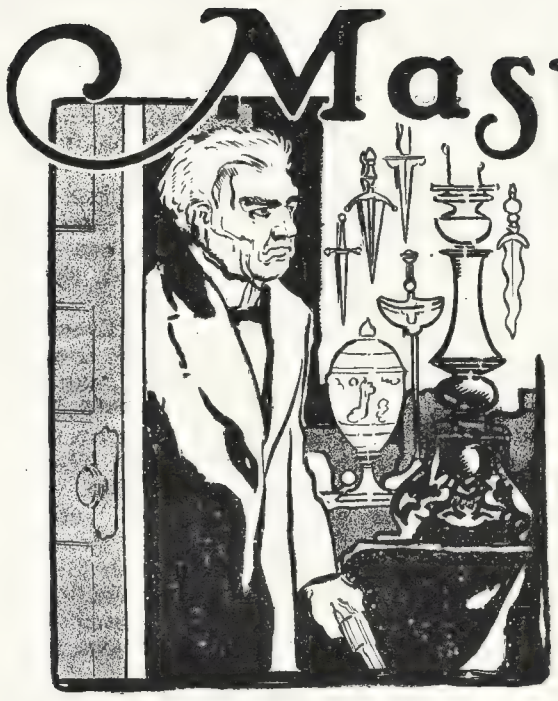
A rope ladder was lowered for him and he clambered up, dripping but happy—liberty money for Kobe in his hand.

OF DEATH.

Two came to me one mystic night;
The first was fair, and angel bright;
His feer, more foul than tongue can tell,
Seemed as a fiend from very hell.

"Oh, who art thou, fair one?" I cried,
And he, "Lo, I am Death," replied;
"Who, then, art thou, fearful to see?"
"I am the Dread of Death," quoth he.

Ellen Gray Barbour.



Master of Them All

By Stephen Chalmers

CHAPTER I.

THE PERFECT CRIMINAL.

ONLY Bayard Fennell was at home, and the butler, David Lamar.

Of course, the butler did not count, though the master had recently been wondering and worrying about this suave individual.

How much did he know about the household's private affairs?

Had he brains enough to put a price upon his knowledge?

Fennell was in one of his occasional brooding fits.

With a large, thin-haired head, a quietly lined, clean-shaven face, and a medium-sized, wide-shouldered figure that inclined to stoutness, Fennell had all the earmarks of a retired and well-to-do person—a Wall Street man, perhaps, who had wound up his business after one great day and now held the turf a pastime, or played golf in the mornings to keep down his waist-line.

As a matter of fact, he was the head of a syndicate of criminals, and this fashionable apartment was the syndicate's headquarters.

Occasionally, as Fennell smoked and stared, his light, sparse, straggly eyebrows seemed to curl up at the outer corners, and his mouth curve into a harder line. Then he would purse his lips over the cigar-smoke, bring his eyebrows together and drive a gray jet as if at the point of his thought.

"David," said he, with an interrogatory note.

"Sir?" said the butler, placing a tray, bearing a demi-tasse and some cigars, on a low table by Fennell's deep chair.

David was middle-aged and middle-sized, slight, and with a half-nourished air. His hair was—a faded, dried-out brown, perhaps—very difficult of accurate description. His sallow, thin face was quite immobile, while suggesting great mobility—the elasticity necessary to sustained expression.

Two large ears were plastered flat against his head, his arms were long and his hands large-knuckled and peculiarly white, while his eyes, of a very odd sea-hue, were half-hidden by lids that were decidedly weak and almost hairless.

"David," said the master, after a while, "it's a fact that no valet is a hero in his master's eyes."

"Yes, sir?"

"But a valet," Fennell went on, "is seldom a fool. Like a hotel-clerk he learns

much by observation. David, I'm going to talk to you."

"Yes, sir," said the butler.

"You've been in this house two years. I took you without reference. Why? You know, and I know, David. You're no fool. You know what goes on, but I've never worried about what you might do with the knowledge.

"You walked in here, said something about wanting no evenings off, being a person of quiet tastes and discretion, having had much experience in *various* ways, and being anxious to enter the service of gentlemen whose business was their own and who knew how to mind nobody else's.

"Had you been a little less direct, it wouldn't have worked, my friend. But I looked at you, and—I knew. This is no place for the light-footed gentry. That's why you came—eh, David?"

"Just as you say, sir," said David, blinking his weak eyelids.

Fennell glanced at the butler's face. It expressed nothing. Yet Fennell was not satisfied.

"Something of the same sort has happened to me—in a much larger way, of course. I need a holiday—indoors. You follow me?"

"Quite," said David. "To parody Swinburne, 'A criminal's home is his castle.'"

Fennell smiled. The quotation and the remark it adorned did not astonish him. This butler was a peculiar man—quite a mystery to the criminal masters he served.

Fennell had his usual caution about him. He wanted to talk. He had need of some one to talk to. Also, he felt a powerful curiosity to get at the inside of this butler's skull.

"Somebody has got to take my place," said Fennell, addressing himself mostly to the fire. "But is one of them fit, David? You've seen for yourself."

"Precisely, sir," said David. "Will you have some fresh coffee?"

"No," said Fennell irritably. Could he never break through the ice?

"There's St. Cloud," he resumed. "He has nerve. He has balance. He has—er—"

"*Savoir faire,*" said David gently.

"Yes," said Fennell, nodding his head approvingly. "That's it. He goes about the business of removing Mrs. Suydam's stomacher with as much ease as he will hand Miss Vanderhonk an ice. But he's no good at anything else. He'd scream at sight of a mouse. He worried old Ezra out of the house over that dirty clay pipe.

"You remember the night he came home with a bullet just below his right lung, and was tickled to death because the blood hadn't showed on his shirt-front, or soaked into his new silk waistcoat?"

"Yes, sir," said David. "I had to take his clothes off very carefully—very carefully, sir. Only the lining was a little touched. He was very pleased, sir—very pleased."

"Then there's Gough," continued Fennell. "A useful man with his knowledge of affairs, his grip of world happenings. But he has the literary germ, which inclines a practical criminal to too much theory. He's erratic and conceited, too. It's a combination that's fatal to leadership.

"The same thing, almost, applies to Cobb, too," Fennell went on. "He's a great man, Cobb, when you set aside his weakness for telling you how he did it. He's the kind of great man in a criminal way, though, who is apt to stumble over his own greatness."

"Mr. Cobb," said David, "has a peculiar form of nervousness."

"What's that?" inquired Fennell encouragingly.

"Mr. Cobb is a physical coward," said the butler, his dull manner oddly in contrast with what he was saying. "Mentally he is no coward. He just loves to be afraid."

Fennell blew a cloud of smoke. He smiled at the odd but accurate diagnosis of Mr. Calvin Cobb — "the Speeder," as he was called in practical circles. Fennell had a momentary vision of Cobb with the sweat of terror melting his collar. That was when the safe combination didn't work in the strong-room of the Morningside Bank.

Fennell was silent for a while. It was a new thought, this—an interesting phase of human nature in general, and of Calvin Cobb in particular.

"What do you think of Ezra Miles?" he asked after a while, transferring the lead to the butler.

"He's a very nice old gentleman," said David adroitly.

"I didn't mean that, and you know it!" snapped Fennell. "Could Ezra take my place for, say, a month?"

"Yes, sir—he could," replied David unperturbed. "And you wouldn't all land in jail, as would be the case if Cobb directed;

or become social lions pilfering embroidered handkerchiefs if St. Cloud led; or become autobiographers of your own crimes, if Mr. Gough were managing editor.

"The gentlemen whom I have the honor to serve would grow fat—doing nothing. If I seem to step out of my place, sir, please remind me. But from my own observation, Mr. Miles is a very wonderful executor. He has no nerves. He has no feelings. He has enormous strength, and I believe he has an enormous brain. But his brain can be roused only by a strong suggestion and very strong tobacco."

"For a man who hasn't uttered two hundred words in two years, you did very nicely that time," said Fennell. "But you're right. Ezra would steal the pyramids if you told him to, and only scratch his head when he found they were hard to get away with. But, as you say, he needs a suggestion and a shove. A leader is the man who coins the suggestion and delivers the shove."

There was a long silence. David Lamar stood still, as if awaiting the signal to withdraw himself. Fennell smoked and frowned.

"So there you are," he said, at last. "Just what I figured before I began talking. All experts in their line, but not one of them embodies the qualifications of a perfect criminal."

He spoke of a "perfect criminal" as if it were some sort of desirable weather. But when he spoke again there was repressed heat in his voice.

"What I am looking for is a criminal who has nerve, aptitude, and the view-point that sets sentimentalism aside and regards crime as a business.

"Sentimentalism!" he sneered, after a pause. "Many a good man has gone up the river through taking out his little bit of sentiment to cuddle at the wrong time.

"There was Morello. Never a man like him in his line. The only crook, barring Cobb, that ever crossed the dead-line and took a case of bonds from the hands of two messengers and three detectives. Fell in love with a fool woman and got the bracelets on her door-step.

"Ten years—and when he came out he married her. You'd 'a' thought he'd had time to reflect on women all these years. Married her!

"Jack Balch went to Dartmoor because the woman between him and Lady Stanhope's jewel-case was a blonde. If she'd been a brunette, or a blonde of another shade, he'd have offered her the smelling-salts. But, no — somebody in the 'dear, dead days' was a blonde!

"I had one man—Thorp. Thought he was dead to all feeling. Passing a Star of Hope meeting one night, he 'saw the light.'

"Great Jumping Jerusalem! Confessed his 'experiences' on the spot, and was nabbed as he stepped off the band-wagon. And when he came out of jail he dug up his loot and gave it all to the Star of Hope people. They made him a lieutenant-colonel, and—"

Fennell got up and walked about. He was battling with inward rage. David watched him with a face as placid as a deep mountain pool, and eyes that were as unblinking as a snake's.

The head of the criminal syndicate stopped before his butler. Fennell seemed to have forgotten to whom he was speaking. He was only conscious that it was somebody who had ears to drink in his expressed feelings and never a tongue to repeat them.

"I know if I step outside the door they'll get me," said he. "There's a time to let up. It came for you two years ago, or perhaps it didn't. It's your business, not mine. But it's come for me.

"I can't trust one of the four—Big Four, as they call themselves. I'd give ten thousand dollars this minute if I could find the man I want to take my place—the perfect criminal. Can you show me such a man?"

David Lamar's eyes were fixed on Fennell's face. They were like little iron pellets embedded in live steel. The weak lids had vanished, and the orbs were wide and ablaze.

The immobile countenance had suddenly relaxed its fixed expression.

The face that Bayard Fennell saw under the dried-out, faded brown hair and between the large, close, flat ears was almost inspired.

Then the tense face of the butler broke into a hard smile. David Lamar placed a deliberate forefinger upon his own breast in the manner of one who, having but heard his merits assessed, introduced himself without false modesty.

"I am the man," said he.

"You!" said Fennell, more startled by the sudden metamorphosis of the man's appearance and manner than by what he said.

"Yes — I. As David Lamar you have known me only as a very competent butler.

If you only knew my real name, Fennell, you, who are the second criminal in the world, would at once admit that I am the first!"

CHAPTER II.

THE SERVANT IS MASTER.

"YOU'LL have to excuse me," said Fennell, after he got over his surprise.

"I knew you were of the profession the minute you walked into this house two years ago. But—you've got to show me, unless"—his eyes gleamed suspiciously—"the alternative is that you will betray us to the police."

"We won't speak of that," said the butler smoothly. "There's no need. Besides that, I am qualified myself to the extent that I am wanted in five republics and two empires, besides being taboo in seven miscellaneous countries and considered undesirable in fourteen European principal cities."

"From a business standpoint," said Fennell with genial sarcasm, "that's inexcusable."

"Pardon me," said David Lamar with a grim smile, "if I know anything of your history, you left India suddenly eleven years ago; escaped Cairo disguised as a pilgrim for Mecca six years ago; jumped out of the frying-pan of Tunis into the fire of Sicily eight years ago; got out of London by the skin of your teeth after the Stanhope affair (in which the lamented Jack Balch tripped over the blonde); and, according to yourself, you are afraid to step outside the front door in case they get you now.

"Such things happen, my dear Fennell, to the most far-seeing criminal," added the butler coolly. "It's time you took a holiday. I've been in this prison two years, and I'm sick to get out. I'm safe; you're not. And I'm your master at the game. You admitted it yourself twelve years ago—at Zanzibar."

Fennell made no secret of his sudden, solemn astonishment. Who was this man—he instantly forgot that David had ever been his butler—who knew so much, and in detail, of his past life.

Who was the man he himself had spoken of at Zanzibar?

Stars of the first magnitude were common enough in those days and in those parts. There was Ishkander, the Syrian. There was Espinosa, who kidnaped the daughter of half the Ionian Isles. There was Relampago, "the lightning conductor."

But Ishkander had disappeared. Espinosa had dropped out, and Relampago, the greatest of them all, was said to have been strung up by the thumbs in the sun for the delectation of a barbaric prince whose rubies he tried to remove.

"I might be anybody," said Lamar, in answer to the natural question. "A name may be only one of a chameleon's colors. Let me show you."

"Show me."

"I was born in Spain," said Lamar; "at Toledo, where they make the finest steel blades. My grandfather was a swordmaker. My father was from Damascus, where they also make fine steel. He came to Toledo and met my mother. I have her eyes," he added very gently. "Many of the Spanish women have blue eyes and fair hair. The great Isabel's was red."

Fennell inadvertently looked at the man's eyes. The sea-blue had shaded into another hue. They were like the ocean in somber mood, with the cold glint of tempered steel in moonlight.

"My mother had a sword," he went on, still with the peculiar note of reverence—or was it hypnotic insistence? "It had been my grandfather's. I played with it as a child. It had lettering on the blade. When I was old enough I read without understanding:

"'*Ad astra per aspera!*'

"A sailor came to Toledo. I think he was some old drunkard who had once been a scholar. He made his living by tattooing. He picked up my sword, which I used to carry as a plaything. My mother, who was superstitious about steel, said it would make a man of me. The drunkard read the inscription, and told me that it meant:

"'To the stars through bolts and bars.'

"He tattooed the inscription on my right arm. Here it is."

Lamar pulled back his sleeve.

Half-way between the wrist and the elbow, Fennell saw a ribbon outlined in blue and fastened, seemingly, by an excellently tattooed buckle. Between the outlining parallels of the ribbon the Latin words were tattooed in blood-red.

For a minute Lamar stood still with his left hand clasped round his right wrist. Fennell suddenly observed what appeared to be two white streaks about an inch and a half long, one on the back of each hand.

"Let me see the palms of your hands," said he quietly.

Lamar pulled down his sleeves and did as requested. The scars appeared on the palms also.

"How?" grunted Fennell.

"Oh — these?" said Lamar, spreading his arms at full length from his body. "Like this—the art of a Tibetan priest. But I broke through the nails and got away with what I went for. Also, I saw him before I left."

"Humph!" grunted Fennell.

"We were speaking of the sword," continued the butler. "The old drunkard stole it. I was so taken up with my tattoo that I forgot it. I haven't seen that sword since. Some day I will. It meant much to me and to my mother—just what I never found out. But the motto became my creed. When in doubt I remember:

"'*Ad astra per aspera!*' 'To the stars through bolts and bars.' I never fail."

"And after that?"

"I refer you to your own history, Fennell," said Lamar with a grin. "When you broke away from all that bound you to one place, you walked the road I did."

"Well—what brought you here?"

Fennell was studying the man, wondering if he were genuine, marveling at his own inward willingness to believe him genuine. Lamar smiled at his question.

"You have forgotten me," said he, "or, rather, you are unable to place me. You believed that all other criminals were small fry. I have never considered any gentleman of the persuasion too insignificant for my directory.

"I know every movement you made since you first hove in sight in the Surinan matter twenty years ago. But I never saw you until I walked into this house two years ago. You never saw me, even when you spoke of me as the greatest criminal alive—at Zanzibar.

"But I saw you soar in the profession. There were times when I almost regarded you as a rival. But I never came into personal contact with you. I shall not say 'conflict,' for we should have shaken hands on it."

"What brought you here?" reiterated Fennell, becoming aware that he was falling under the spell of David Lamar.

"Oh—that should be apparent. Where should I be safer in emergency than here—under the sheltering wing of Fennell, master criminal; of Cobb, who stole the Gainsborough from a London shop-window; of Miles, who robbed the Golden Gate Limited, single-handed; of St. Cloud, who pressed a pistol to young Lord Clanronald's side just after he'd cashed in at Epsom, and of the estimable Gough, who wrote an autobiography of his own life and crimes and was called a liar for his pains."

"You're a wonder," said Fennell frankly. "How have you managed to keep that nimble tongue of yours still for two years?"

"I was thinking," said David Lamar, as guilelessly as a child might speak. "I am fond of quiet pursuits, such as reading and collecting first editions. One you can do in your room, the other by mail. Would you like to see my study?"

"Your—study? Why, yes. The night's young," said Fennell, covering surprise with levity.

"Come along," said the servant, with the easy indifference of perfect equality.

He led the way to the rear of the apartments, where the butler's room and bath were. The moment David switched on the light, Fennell, who had followed in mingled amusement, amazement, and the conviction that he was about to discover something, was astonished at what he saw.

The butler's room had no bed, apparently. But there was a couch, covered with a magnificent silk article of oriental make and design. At the head of the couch there were a number of cushions, clothed in luxurious casings from the East. A plain American-made table was disguised beneath more Far-Eastern drapery, and an escritoire stood in a corner.

The whole far side of the room was occupied by a long bookcase of the collapsible variety. It was stretched to its utmost capacity and filled with books of all ages, sorts, and sizes.

On the top of the bookcase, on the table, on the escritoire, and hung around upon the walls, were curiosities and art objects from almost every part of the world, civilized and uncivilized. The only out-of-the-way feature of the room was a collection of small bottles on a ledge over the bath-room door.

"Poisons," said Lamar apologetically. "Made a study of them in the East—all unknown, or little known in the Occident, or to medical science anywhere. Old secrets revived. But you wished to see my collection of first editions."

Whether they were first editions, Fennell

knew little and cared less. They were merely books to him.

He glanced along the bindings. They presented a queer mixture of philosophy, religion, poetry, drama, and sensationalism. La Fontaine's verse leaned against the Holy Bible, and Marcus Antoninus was supported by a ten-cent paper volume of "Nick Carter," which, in turn, leaned against Tennyson's "Idylls of the King."

Lamar's baby-blue eyes turned to Fennell's face. The gaze of the two men lingered. The head of the syndicate was using his keenest faculties to probe what was in the brain of this sudden, odd, human composite of contradictions.

"But," said Fennell, determined to throw off the glamour of the man's personality, "none of this proves you a criminal expert yourself, let alone fit to take my place at the head of the Big Four. You've got to show me."

"Yes, yes," said David Lamar quickly. "I had forgotten for the moment. But, you know, I hate idle demonstrations of criminal ability. Still— Of course, you understand that—at this particular moment you are—absolutely—in—my—power."

"I am, am I?" said Fennell, taking a swift backward step and placing himself between Lamar and the door. "Show me."

"If you insist. Of course, I might point out that, were I so disposed, I could dictate terms to the syndicate with the alternative of unloading two years' information upon the police.

"But don't let's even speak of that. Suppose I demonstrate my power more professionally—say, by robbing you of your keys and helping myself to the contents of the big safe in your bedroom?"

"Come right ahead," said Fennell, with a grin.

Without a change of countenance, David took a forward step which brought him within half an arm's length of Bayard Fennell.

The master's right hand flashed from his pocket, and the muzzle of a revolver was pressed against the butler's ribs.

For a moment the two men looked into each other's eyes over the two feet of space that separated them. On Fennell's face was an amused grin, while into Lamar's eyes crept that which looked like childish pain and fear.

He seemed to draw a long breath. For a second longer the two were like a group of clothed statuary.

Then a swift haze spread over Fennell's eyes, and he sank in a heap on the floor at David Lamar's feet!

When he came to, about fifteen minutes later, he found David sitting in a chair opposite him.

"Feel better, I hope," said the butler.

"What time is it?" asked Fennell, completely dazed with wonder.

"See for yourself," said Lamar, picking up Fennell's gold watch from the table and handing it to him. "Let me also return your rings, your scarf-pin; also your wallet. You seem to have a fancy for new bills. It's a common whim — nice, new, crisp, yellow ones."

Fennell took the articles in silence. In his face was an expression that was more of admiration than humiliation.

"Here, too, are the keys of your safe," said the butler. "You will find everything intact—except this."

From a vest-pocket he drew a deep-fired, dark stone. It looked like a cat's-eye of enormous size.

"I was surprised to find that you had the Tiger's Eye," said Lamar, as he handed it back to Fennell. "'Twas I who first brought it out of Tibet—stole it from the Dalai Lama, and suffered for my pains."

He turned up the palms of his hands with a grim smile.

"David," said Fennell, with conviction in his manner and decision in his tone. "You're elected!"

"So good of you," said David coolly, "but in future please call me Lamar."

"Very well. In the meantime, what's your program?"

"Criminal—I shall have something to say to the 'family' in the morning. Domestic— The evening has been so full that I have neglected the silver. Silver, you know, is extremely difficult to clean.

"Good night!" said he, opening the door for Fennell to pass out. "If Gough comes in and wants a nightcap, tell him to help himself!"

CHAPTER III.

THE FAMILY IS INTERVIEWED.

EZRA MILES, the last to come home that night, was first in the breakfast-room next morning.

Of course, the butler had been up for

an hour before that, but so far as matters had progressed with the Big Four, David was merely the butler—as yet.

When Gough, the literary criminal, came down, Ezra had already swallowed breakfast, and was leaning back in his chair smoking his eternal clay pipe.

Ezra himself was a huge man with an abnormally large head. His little eyes were good-natured, and the one that was cast was so slightly affected that—it was Gough who had said it—Ezra seemed merely to be looking into the near future.

Ezra seldom uttered a word. Nicknamed "The Grouch," "The Silent," "Monosyllabic Miles," and other variations of the same thing, he yet managed to articulate at times, between puffs of the dirty clay, a word or two that conveyed whole paragraphs.

He had seen a great deal of life—how much nobody ever fully learned. He would suddenly rip out a word that would suggest a greater knowledge of a subject that somebody else was describing at length.

Though really a first-class, all-round criminal, with less sentiment in his make-up than anybody, barring Fennell, perhaps, Ezra was at present engaged in the (to him) apprentice work of kidnaping millionaires' babies. A special aptitude for this kind of work was children's inexplicable fondness for this gruff giant, and the tenderness with which Ezra nursed them while ransom was pending.

Gough, who had just entered the breakfast-room, was a very opposite type of person. He spelled "*litterateur*" from the top of his dark, bushy-haired head to the tips of his delicate fingers. And he wore a flowing black-silk necktie, done into a *négligée* knot.

A clever scamp was Gough. As an editorial writer for the *Chronicle*, that organ of capitalists and the highly respected if not so highly-respectable, he also wrote poems, serious treatises on subjects that were never taken seriously, and specials for the Sunday papers.

These things he did on the surface. What he did below the surface people were less ready to believe the more he made the matter public.

Gough had a remarkable detective faculty. He discovered it after he had been Jack-of-all-trades in his native England and mastered quite a number. Then he entered the service of Scotland Yard, which he served with great credit—to the Yard.

Realizing by observation the simplicity of committing a crime and getting away with it, and coming to the conclusion that the bigger the crime the larger the assurance of safety, he abandoned detective work and turned criminal himself. Variety was his specialty; also it was his weakness. He no sooner did a thing than he had no desire to do it again.

Quite recently he had written a book, entitled "Cold Bluff." It purported to be the autobiography of a criminal, and in it Gough confessed some of the crimes he himself committed and got away with.

The crimes were found to be catalogued all right; but both Scotland Yard and the United States Secret Service (perhaps to cover up their own failings) stated that it was quite easy for any romancer to weave solutions of unsolved mysteries, making himself the villain-hero for notoriety's sake.

In short, although Gough signed his own name to the book, nobody believed it was his real name who did not know him, and his literary associates, who thought they knew him, merely complimented him on getting out the "best seller" of the year.

At present Gough was the criminal syndicate's general artist and human encyclopedia of events, past, present, and probable. As a reliable man, however, he was somewhat spoiled by a tendency to write a story about whatever he did. It made Cobb nervous.

Cobb came down to breakfast presently; rather, he collided with breakfast. A human dynamo was Cobb. He was always in a hurry, always apprehensive of missing something at the place where he didn't happen to be, and invariably on the edge of profuse perspiration.

"Say!" exclaimed Cobb, upsetting one chair as he got into another, "I'm satisfied to be on this side of the Tombs this morning. Went after the alleged Poe manuscript at the Playwrights' Bazaar last night. Had my fingers on the thing and was working toward an inside pocket when —somebody tapped me on the shoulder.

"Scared?" said Cobb, glancing fearfully at Ezra and Gough. He crammed half a buttered roll into his mouth and chewed so rapidly and nervously that his bulging cheeks grew red and a sheen of moisture overspread his face.

Ezra Miles and Dudley Gough waited

for him to swallow and tell them what happened to relieve the painful situation.

"She just wanted to sell me a rose for a dollar—just one teeny-weeny dollar," continued Cobb, a ray of relief coming to dry up the sheen of nervous moisture. "What could I do? She pinned it in my buttonhole and loved me with her eyes as she did it. Then I discovered I had but twenty cents—"

Again a mouthful of buttered roll and again the sheen of moist embarrassment at the memory of that painful situation.

"I felt in every pocket," said Cobb, swallowing hard. "I felt in my inside pocket and left the Poe manuscript there while doing it. Then I apologized and went to find a friend. She followed me!

"Say, did you ever go hunting round in a confined place looking for an imaginary friend with an imaginary dollar, with a relentless female tagging after, and every minute expecting to hear a wild shriek, '*The priceless Poe manuscript has been swiped!*'?"

"Of course you got away?" ventured Gough absently.

"Got away? Did I get away? Foolish Question Number One. What do you think, David?" appealing to Lamar, who had apparently resumed his rôle of humble butler.

"To what do you refer?" said the butler. "The question, your probable answer, or the story?"

Cobb stopped with his mouth full of bacon. Gough looked up and stared at David. Only Ezra Miles went on smoking as if nothing unusual had fallen from the lips of the one-worded servant.

"If you mean the question," said David lightly, "it was characteristic of Mr. Gough, who is sometimes painfully inane. If you mean the story, it was characteristic of Calvin Cobb, except that it was touched with more humor than most of the Cobb brand. If you mean your probable answer to Gough's fool question—"

That was as far as he got. Cobb was on his feet. So was Gough. Ezra even deigned to turn his head, but there was a twinkle in the big man's little eyes. At the same moment the dining-room door opened and in walked Bayard Fennell.

"Look 'e here, Fennell!" said Cobb almost inarticulately. "If you don't fire this long green measle of a butler quick, I'll break his neck!"

"He has been guilty of unpardonable impertinence," put in Gough, while Ezra smoked and watched.

"Gentlemen, be seated," said Fennell humorously.

Then he told them. It was a very brief statement, but it left Cobb and Gough on their beam-ends. They remained standing with their eyes fixed on the butler, who seemed at that particular moment more of a menial idiot than he had ever appeared before.

"Good Heavens!" said Gough. Cobb dropped back into his chair.

While they were still trying to comprehend what Fennell had said, in walked the social St. Cloud, as unsociable a lion as ever came to breakfast in a bathrobe and a vile morning temper. He dropped into a chair by the table, picked up a copy of the *Chronicle*, and said snappily:

"Coffee, David!"

Every eye turned to the butler. With never a change of face, Lamar served St. Cloud, then resumed his menial pose.

Fennell sat at the head of the table, coolly buttering toast. At the silence he looked up with a sudden setting of his powerful jaws. He looked from one face to another, and saw no compromise there.

"Obedience to David Lamar is obedience to me!" said he in a low, level voice. St. Cloud looked up with a start. "You know what that means. I never exacted obedience in the sense of master and servant; merely the recognition of the necessity for a leading spirit in the business for which we are organized.

"If you are dissatisfied with my choice of David Lamar to lead, you are dissatisfied with me. In that case, we will take a step back and discuss me before coming to him. Cobb—talk!"

Cobb broke out in a perspiration, but did not duck.

"This thing may be all right. But, first, I want to know something about this man. Who is he?"

Lamar was standing with his back to the wall, his arms folded, and his eyes expressive of little interest in what was going on. Maurice St. Cloud was still staring, first at the butler, then at Fennell, trying to adjust his mind to what was going on.

"I wouldn't advise you," said Fennell, "to seek explanation or further satisfaction. You're likely to get both within twenty-four hours. He satisfied me, and,"

Fennell added with a shrug and a laugh, "I should hate to see the way he did it figure in my biography!"

"Look here, Fennell," said Cobb hotly, "I want to see the best man at the head of the board of directors, but does it seem fair that you should pick out this man, about whom you know nothing? I can see you know nothing.

"You know me, as you know St. Cloud, Miles, and Gough. You know what each of us has done. You know what I've done in my time. You know that there are six scars on my body, got in your service."

"For Heaven's sake, Cobb, give over holding *post-mortems* and thanksgiving services."

That finished Cobb.

"You?" said David Lamar suddenly, nodding his head at St. Cloud.

The elegant started and stared. Then he turned rather loftily to Fennell.

"I begin to gather," said he, "what all this is about. If my senses have not betrayed me, then let me say at once that I refuse to have a butler made master of my affairs and dictator over my intelligence."

He stared loftily at the butler. His stare held — or, rather, it was held. Lamar's blue eyes were turned upon the elegant's indignant orbs with almost diabolical fixity. St. Cloud, who thought he could stare any menial into subservience, attempted the battle of looks.

But the peculiarity of those seemingly lidless eyes presently acted upon St. Cloud's nerves. Suddenly he averted his gaze before that stare which was more powerful than violence.

"You?" said David Lamar, the stare passing relentlessly to Dudley Gough.

The *litterateur's* objection took the form of a flow of sarcastic levity—an explosion of clever verbiage without a bolt of meaning.

"Gough," said Lamar, when the other had done, "you are a very clever young man, but one-half of your brilliant brain doesn't know how to direct the other half.

"You?" he went on, turning the snake-like eyes upon Ezra Miles.

Ezra took the clay pipe from his mouth, turned his little eyes upon Lamar, and grunted:

"Sultan of Salivat. Good enough for me!"

"Eh!" exclaimed Fennell, suddenly waking up, as did Cobb, Gough, and even St. Cloud. Eyes turned inquiringly, wonderingly, from Ezra to the sallow, blue-eyed, lean butler.

"Him!" said the stoic Ezra. "Relampago—Espinosa—Ishkander—Lamar — all the same."

Then they all stared at Lamar, who was smiling ever so slightly.

It was difficult to believe that this insignificant-looking person was no other than Espinosa, the criminal genius whose name had been inspiration to the cult and terror to the uninitiated from Malta to Zanzibar; that this blue-eyed, long-limbed, narrow-shouldered menial was the notorious Captain Relampago, "the lightning-conductor" of many a criminal feat, and who was supposed to have died by torture in Siam.

Yet Ezra had said so, and Ezra never spoke until he was sure of what he had to say. Also, it was known to them all that Ezra himself had had a hand in that daring Salivat matter—when the Sultan was kidnaped and held aboard his own best warship until the crown jewels were forthcoming, tied up in a plain meal-bag.

Now Fennell remembered of whom he had spoken at Zanzibar that day. The man of many names and reputations was Ishkander then—a Syrian from Damascus. But Lamar, Espinosa, Relampago, or Ishkander, there was nothing more to be said. He was alive! He was here! He was one and the same. He was master of them all!

"That was fifteen years ago, Ezra," said Lamar, who had been smiling at his quondam aide. "I thought you had forgotten me. I knew you by the pipe, if nothing else.

"Gentlemen," he added, turning to the others, "I am glad to have been spared the necessity for a *post-mortem*. I hate nothing more.

"And now," he went on, gathering the five men within the radius of his stare, "confident that I shall hear no more from the reminiscent Cobb, or the silver-tongued Gough, or the gentle St. Cloud, or the guttural Ezra—assured, in short, that the butler will not betray two years' gathered information to the police—the butler will now issue a few preliminary orders."

Had it not been for that parenthetic remark about the police it is probable there would have been a revolt right there. But —power and personality were puissant persuaders.

"Primarily," said David Lamar, "before

introducing you to a little criminal scheme of mine, I wish to test your fitness to participate in its execution. So understand, please, that no matter how strange my directions, there is always method in my seeming madness. There is something behind."

Then he proceeded to issue orders that had much of "seeming madness" in them.

"Mr. Gough," said he, "bring me, before noon to-morrow, and by whatever wit and method you may choose to employ, ten thousand dollars, or collateral, convertible value. We may need funds.

"Mr. Miles, give me assurance before noon to-morrow that you have kidnaped the only child of Lorenzo Vandewater, who, I may add, is the richest man in the United States, besides being the most dangerous to meddle with.

"Mr. St. Cloud"—again the venomous stare compelled the elegant to heel—"as we are speaking of the Vandewater family, suppose you remove the famous Sheba necklace which Mrs. Vandewater wears on special occasions. I believe the opera season opens to-night.

"And Mr. Cobb—I have something suited to your peculiar tastes and talents. The Babylonian deluge tablet, which was unearthed from the temple library at Nippur four years ago, has been loaned to the Institute of Natural History. Bring it to me—here.

"You have until noon to-morrow, gentlemen—ample time."

"What's the game, David?" asked Fennell bluntly.

For a second resentment flashed in Lamar's eyes. But sufficient for the hour was the victory thereof.

"I intend," said he slowly, "to break into the most impregnable strong-room in the world and get away with a treasure more fabulously valuable than King Solomon's ever was in its best days!"

CHAPTER IV.

IN ACTION.

BEFORE Dudley Gough reached the offices of the *Chronicle* he had fully made up his mind that he hated David Lamar. He hated him principally because of the conviction that no small part of Lamar's whip-handle consisted of his power to betray the whole syndicate to the police.

Also, Lamar knew more about literature and events than Gough did, and he was gifted with more of what Gough had considered his own specialty—a clever knack of language and imperturbable *sang-froid*.

It soothed Gough's wounded vanity to think that he, alone among the members of the criminal syndicate, had been asked to choose his own "stunt." He was to procure ten thousand dollars by his own wit, method, initiative, and execution before noon on the following day.

As he sat in the *Chronicle* offices, thinking over the whole matter, he did not fail to observe how the name of Vandewater figured, directly or indirectly, in the various "preliminary orders."

Ezra Miles was to kidnap Vandewater's child. As kidnaping was Ezra's present line, the order to kidnap the child of the most powerful man in the country might be a test. But it was Lamar himself who had said there was method in his madness.

Gough applied his old detective faculty to other points in the matter. He presently came to the conclusion that St. Cloud was not under order to steal the famous Sheba necklace from Mrs. Vandewater, just because Lamar had been "speaking of the Vandewater family." For Gough presently perceived that the name of Vandewater was involved in Cobb's charge — to steal the Babylonian tablet from the institute.

Lorenzo Vandewater, besides being the great financier and organizing genius in the country, was also the greatest collector of art objects and antiquities in the world. It was his expensive hobby, and his treasures filled a steel-walled private museum.

Thence had come the Sheba necklace which Mrs. Vandewater wore on special occasions, and thence had come the Babylonian tablet which was loaned to the Institute of Natural History.

Cobb was in reality to steal Lorenzo Vandewater's tablet!

"It's Vandewater, and Vandewater's strong-room, wherein are treasures beyond comparison with Solomon's," said Gough to himself. "But Mr. Lamar may find he has bitten off more than he can masticate if he thinks he can meddle successfully with that colossal genius."

Gough found consolation in the thought that Lamar would get his fingers burned. He would like to see that blade-tongued, steel-eyed scoundrel tumbled off the pedestal upon which he had so coolly placed him-

self. There was really only one man in the whole syndicate, including Fennell, who was fit to think of coping with the colossus, Vandewater. That one was Dudley Gough.

"Why not?" he suddenly asked himself. "He is obviously after Vandewater. It would be stealing his own thunder if I could demonstrate how the great man could be made use of without having recourse to the kidnaping of suckling infants."

He fell into a brown study, while he idly clipped the foreign papers with his shears. Presently he paused.

He laid down the shears, removed his eye-glasses, and dangled them thoughtfully on their intellectual black-silk braid.

When the idea had focused in Mr. Gough's brain he put the glasses on again, very slowly, and rose to his feet.

Presently he called the Wall Street Bureau of the *Chronicle,* and asked about the movements of Lorenzo Vandewater.

"Left the Street for the day?" he echoed over the telephone. "Gone to his country house in the Ramapo Hills. That's near the village of Pineridge, isn't it—on the Erie? Thank you."

Mr. Gough hung up the receiver. After a few minutes of thoughtful fiddling with the black braid, he used the telephone again.

"No, thank you, Miss Colter," said he. "No number. I merely wished to get the name of the Central News Agency's correspondent at Pineridge. Westcott? Thank you, Miss Colter. No—don't call him."

Then Mr. Gough, smiling to himself, examined a railroad guide, and glanced at his watch, which was also attached to gold-mounted silk braid.

Fifteen minutes later he left the *Chronicle* offices, having first notified the editorial chief that his only cousin had passed away!

About the time that Mr. Gough climbed aboard a train at Jersey City, bound for Pineridge in the Ramapo Hills, Calvin Cobb sat on a bench in Central Park. Mr. Cobb seemed nervous. He had just come from the Institute of Natural History, the red-tiled roof of which was peeping over the trees about two hundred yards away.

Mr. Cobb had just had a look at that Babylonian tablet, and he was still suffering from the resultant shock. To be exact, Mr. Cobb had an idea that he had seen that tablet before—that, in fact, he himself had had it in his bedroom at Port Saïd some few years previously. That was after he had stolen it from Professor Schimmel, who discovered it at Nippur, and just before Cobb himself had had it stolen from him in a very mysterious and discouraging manner.

Well, that was an old story—the sort of *post-mortem* that even Cobb disliked to hold.

It was one thing to remove that tablet from Professor Schimmel's camp on the Euphrates, just after it had been exhumed, but another matter to walk off with it out of a carefully guarded museum.

There were guards at the door, plain-clothes detectives about the halls, and special guards about the tablet which, as Cobb had ascertained by a visit, lay in the center of a big table in the main hall and carefully railed around.

"It's suicide!" he groaned, rubbing his moist palms together, while his imagination raced over every possible catastrophe and devised means to obviate or offset it.

Still, Cobb's criminal ambition had been stirred by Lamar. Just how and why, Cobb himself was not sure. If he accomplished this feat he would have the satisfaction of asking Lamar to go one better.

"If he can beat walking out of a museum with a heavy tablet," reflected Mr. Cobb, "he's a wonder. He can't do it. But the question is—can I get away with that Sixth Chapter of Genesis and still keep out of the house with the big key?"

It grew dusk, and Mr. Cobb was still sitting on the bench, rehearsing grim possibilities and working around them mentally. The doors of the museum closed for the night, and Mr. Cobb was still on the bench, perspiring, and rubbing his hands together.

The park lamps had long been lighted when at last Cobb got his idea. His face lit up, and he started to his feet.

"The very thing!" said he. "I'll buy a roll of French lint!" And he started for the nearest drug-store.

About the same time, Maurice St. Cloud, immaculately attired for the evening, was sitting in a box at the opera, wondering how on earth he was to remove the famous Sheba necklace which glittered on the neck of Mrs. Lorenzo Vandewater in a box at the other end of the horseshoe.

(To be continued.)

Julia's Young Man

By

William Patterson White

WHEN T. Satterlee Saltonstall discovered that his daughter Julia was in love with a young man, he almost had apoplexy.

He not only forbade the young man the house, but he shipped Julia to his sister, who owned a large country estate near Los Angeles. He also ordered his sister to watch Julia carefully and see that she did not elope.

T. Satterlee's action was rather unfair. He had not even seen the young man.

He only knew that his name was Morgan, that he had no particular vocation, and that his family had lived on Manhattan Island since the time Peter Stuyvesant surrendered it to the Duke of York, and that was in 1664.

Julia had begged her father to allow Morgan to call at his office and explain matters, but her father vowed to kick him out if he did.

Then Julia, whose hair was Titian, winked back the tears, and told her father what she thought of him. She also told her father that, though her lover had no position in business, he would one day astonish the world.

T. Satterlee bade her tell it to the marines; he himself required ocular proof. Which was inconsistent, as he had refused to see young Morgan.

But T. Satterlee thought that his daughter should marry a prince, or a duke at the very least. Heaven knew she was sweet and beautiful enough, and what were all his millions for, anyway?

So he sent Julia off to California, there

to stay till she should become amenable to his will.

Little T. Satterlee knew of love. He had been a widower eighteen years, and money-getting had destroyed most of his finer feelings.

Two months after Julia's arrival on the Coast, T. Satterlee received a lengthy telegram from his sister. It was to the effect that she had come across a letter to Julia from Morgan, saying that all things were ready, and he would be in Los Angeles on the twentieth, perhaps before, and then they two would marry in spite of a dozen frowning fathers and twice that number of Cerberine aunts.

The man of many millions read the telegram twice. Then he pulled his whiskers and swore. It was now the nineteenth, and the fastest monorail express required two full days for the coast to coast trip. It was imperative that he be in Los Angeles the next day. The telegram admitted of no other alternative.

Hastily he called up his brother William, another millionaire, and a man who was always excellent in emergencies. Brother William said he'd come at once and help T. Satterlee out if he could.

"There's only one thing to do, Tom," said the other Saltonstall, when he arrived; "you'll have to go by plane."

"Bosh!" snorted T. Satterlee. "A plane can go no faster than the monorail. Haven't you any ideas at all this morning?"

His brother took no notice of the sarcasm. He calmly picked out a cigar, bit off the end, and lit it, before replying.

"I know a man who has invented a plane that will develop a speed of one-fifty to two hundred miles an hour. It's something new. No other plane can hold a candle to it. The man — his name's Montague — might — mind, I only say might—take you if he were properly approached."

"Call him up! There's the phone! Offer him a dollar a mile and a bonus of twice that if he lands me in Los Angeles by noon!"

"Steady there. Don't excite yourself. Montague is a queer person and detests telephones. He never uses one if he can help it, and if I called him up it might queer matters. I'll go up and see him, though, and let you know in half an hour."

"Hurry!" was all T. Satterlee said.

For nearly thirty minutes he paced the floor. He alternately glanced at the clock and swore, chewing an unlit cigar the while. When the phone rang he snatched the receiver off the hook and held it to his ear.

"This is Bill," said the voice at the other end. "Montague will take you at your own figure. Be at the Belmont landing-stage at eleven o'clock."

T. Satterlee dropped the receiver and rushed out of his office. He had just fifteen minutes in which to go from Wall Street to the landing-stage. He made it with three minutes to spare, and ran pell-mell up the steps of the building, leaving his chauffeur to be arrested by several scandalized bicycle policemen.

Arrived at the landing-stage, he found his brother awaiting him in front of a huge aeroplane. Two grimy individuals were oiling the engines, and a young man in a driver's suit was watching them.

The young man turned out to be Montague, and T. Satterlee expressed himself as very glad to meet him. Montague smiled grimly, and said he'd put T. Satterlee in Los Angeles by midnight, Eastern time, or wreck the plane.

The multimillionaire experienced a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach as he climbed into the roomy glass and mahogany enclosure that held the engines, steering-wheel, levers, and passenger-seats.

Five minutes later the young man took his seat and seized the wheel. One of the grimy individuals climbed into the car and bent over the engines, while the other started the propellers and stepped back.

The engines volleyed, the propellers hummed, and the plane shook, shivered, then shot quietly up into the air.

T. Satterlee turned to wave good-by to his brother and reached the plate-glass window in time to see a bird's-eye view of West Forty-Second Street change to one of the North River and Hoboken.

From a height of two thousand feet, T. Satterlee saw New Jersey and Pennsylvania slide swiftly to the rear. It seemed that they hardly passed over Bellaire on the Ohio, when he looked north and saw Columbus, and wheeled about to see Cincinnati far to the southwest.

At least Montague said it was Cincinnati. Had he called it Sedalia T. Satterlee would have believed him.

At four o'clock in the afternoon the aeroplane passed over St. Louis and volplaned down to the surface of the aviation-field

in the suburbs. T. Satterlee climbed down and stretched his legs. He pinched himself a time or two to see if he were really alive.

Five hours before he was in New York, and now he was west of the Mississippi.

He was so wonderstruck that he forgot that he had eaten nothing since breakfast till Montague mentioned food. They would be compelled to stay in St. Louis half an hour, said Montague, while the grimy man who tended the engines filled the gasoline-tanks. So they went to a restaurant and ate, sitting on high stools before a counter. It was a new experience for T. Satterlee, and he felt so democratic that he forgot his dream of some time being father-in-law to a prince and tipped the waitress five dollars.

He slapped Montague on the back, too, and waxed complimentary over his inventive ability. But Montague merely smiled. He was a silent young person, was Montague, and he had the steady eyes and tanned skin of the men that frequent the high places.

Promptly at four-thirty the aeroplane took the air and hummed westward again. Montague slanted steadily upward, and not till the barograph indicated three thousand feet did he bring his machine to an even keel. T. Satterlee looked down. The earth was blotted out entirely by a woolly-white mass of cloud.

"Rain-storm," said Montague, in answer to the magnate's question. "I never did enjoy dampness, and it retards the speed. I'll have to go higher before we pass the Rockies."

"What's the speed?"

"Two hundred per. She only did one-eighty from New York to St. Louis. The engines are working better now. You'll be in Los Angeles about eight o'clock, Pacific time. You gain four hours. I said midnight, Eastern time. Some going, eh?"

"You're right," said T. Satterlee. "I'll land there in plenty of time to do what I have to do."

"I'm sincerely glad of that. Business deal?"

"Um-m—one might call it that."

Silence ensued, and T. Satterlee began to feel sleepy. He lay down on a side-seat, and was sound asleep in five minutes. When he awoke he saw the engineer examining his oil-cups with a hand-lamp. The sun had set.

T. Satterlee rubbed his eyelids and asked Montague where they were.

"We've just passed over the Needles. You can't see them, of course; but directly beneath us is the Colorado Desert. You'll be in Los Angeles before long."

Three-quarters of an hour later they topped the San Bernardino Range and picked up the lights of Los Angeles and Pasadena. At ten minutes past eight, Pacific time, the aeroplane grounded gently on Miss Saltonstall's front lawn. T. Satterlee shook hands with Montague, and told him to send his bill to the New York office.

"You've earned your bonus, my boy," said T. Satterlee, as he climbed down to the ground.

"I think I have," said Montague.

Three seconds later the aeroplane soared up and off in the direction of Pasadena.

T. Satterlee went stiffly up his sister's porch-steps and rang the bell. He was exceedingly hungry, and he wanted to see his daughter very much. He really did love her a great deal in his own way.

Julia and Miss Saltonstall seemed overjoyed when the butler announced T. Satterlee. Miss Saltonstall at once ordered dinner for him, and Julia petted him and asked innumerable questions concerning his transcontinental trip. But he turned a deaf ear to all her cajoleries.

"I'll talk with you in the morning, young woman," said T. Satterlee. "I'll have no more of this idiotic conduct of yours. I've told you once that you can't marry Morgan, and that settles it."

"Very well, father," replied Julia demurely. "Then I'll go to bed and prepare myself for the ordeal."

She kissed him lightly on the bald spot and danced away. T. Satterlee ate an enormous dinner, and then he, too, sought repose, secure in the knowledge that nothing untoward could occur while he was in the house.

At nine o'clock the following morning he was awakened by a furious hammering on his door.

"What d'ye want?" he growled sleepily.

"Julia's gone!" shrieked the voice of Miss Saltonstall.

T. Satterlee bounded right out of bed, wide-awake in an instant. He partly opened the door and thrust out a tousled head. His sister, in curl-papers and a kimono, essayed to tell what she knew, but he interrupted her.

His eye had fallen on a note that had

been stuck under his door. It was addressed to him, and the handwriting was Julia's.

He picked up the note, and this is what he read:

DEAR DAD:

When you read this I shall have been married to Tom. He came in his plane for me at two o'clock this morning. He is waiting underneath the window now. Please don't be angry, but we planned this little surprise a month ago, and carried it out with the help of Uncle William.

He always believed in Tom, and Tom, the dear boy, has made good. The government has just ordered one hundred of his planes, so we sha'n't starve. It was so good of you to come West with him, and I appreciate it—I really do.

We are going to San Diego for a honeymoon, and we shall both be delighted if you'll come to see us.

Your affectionate daughter,

JULIA.

P. S. Tom's full name is Thomas Montague Morgan. J.

His Benefactor

By

Allen Rieser

JERRY FINNEGAN was extremely seedy and half starved. A striking example of emaciated huskiness was Jerry.

He had sneaked into New York by the back door; for in the ten years Jerry had served in the "pen" he had acquired a reticence that amounted to a panic at the sight of a blue coat and brass buttons. Three months had elapsed since his release, but Jerry's modesty continued unabated.

Jerry edged up to a window where a man, advertising a patent razor, was converting his face into raw beef by constant shaving. Not that Jerry still felt any impersonal interest in the world and its doings, but he was decidedly hungry, and with him primordial desires were stronger than virtue.

Jerry had a habit of losing himself in a crowd whenever he felt in immediate want of any of the creature comforts. Many a time, had he been capable of analyzing his feelings, he would have acknowledged gratitude to the originator of display advertising.

In his illiterate way, Jerry was a student of human nature.

He could tell at a glance the man whose fashionable habiliments had not been paid for and whose wallet was likely to contain nothing but calling-cards and unreceipted bills. After years of close observation, coupled with experience, Jerry knew ready money.

Therefore he selected a well-groomed young man whose clothes, though excellently draped to an athletic figure, betokened indifference as to mode or appearance. Another thing which recommended this one as a possible victim was an air of preoccupation.

Jerry worked his way to a position of vantage and then deftly inserted his left hand into the gentleman's right-hand pocket.

His fingers had just lighted on something cold and hard when they were seized in a viselike grip.

In vain he attempted to wrench free. He looked up at the face of him who was to

have been his victim, but the latter was gazing imperturbably into the show-window.

Jerry knew that it was best for him not to show any outward signs of resistance, but the longer his hand remained in that pocket the greater was the likelihood of its being squeezed into a pulp. The tears were rolling down his cheeks and he was about to give vent to a howl, when he spied a policeman on the outskirts of the crowd. The viselike grip was closing tighter and Jerry knew that it was only a matter of time when he must bolt for it.

"For Mike's sake, mister," he panted. "Leggo—please, leggo. *Ouch! Ouch!* I left it in your pocket—honest."

The grip slowly relaxed, and Jerry was about to take his chances at bolting, when an incisive voice said in his ear: "Not so fast, my friend. Don't you see the cop? I shall be forced to squeeze your hand again for your own protection."

Jerry looked up bewilderedly into a pair of dancing, blue eyes.

"Cut the comedy," said Jerry. "And don't apply that stone-crusher again for the love o' Mike."

"Be good, then," said the stranger, "and don't tamper with ex-football men. Now, if you'll tell me what you were after, maybe I can accommodate you."

"On the level now, friend, I need a meal."

"Such a modest request deserves reward. Come ahead, but see that you keep your hands in your own pockets on the way."

All the way to the restaurant Jerry watched his would-be benefactor with furtive suspicion.

"Say, now, they ain't no game in this, is they?" he asked gruffly, as they were about to enter.

"Your only weak point, my friend," said the stranger, with an air that made Jerry strongly suspect he was being "guyed," "is your lack of faith in humanity."

Jerry shut his jaws tight and formed a resolution. He listened grimly to the other's raillery as he despatched the palatable meal. The coffee was brought on, and Jerry accepted a twenty-five-center from his host with a nonchalance that betrayed no acquaintance with the "Harvest Home" panatella.

He bit off the end calmly, and took the light which the stranger held out to him. Then slowly he extracted a gold watch, a stick-pin, a wallet, and a few minor articles from his pocket, and, laying them on the table, pushed them over to his fellow diner.

"Do ye want yer instep arches back?" he asked.

The young man looked at Jerry in puzzled good nature.

"But why did you return them?" he asked. "I deserve to lose them for being too cock-sure."

"Sentiment was always my weak point," said Jerry. "If it hadn't 'a' been fer that I wouldn't 'a' went up the river on that ten years' trip."

"Served your time, eh?" said the stranger, with intense interest manifest in his sparkling eyes. "Tell me, how do you fellows evolve? Are most of you born that way, or are circumstances more often responsible?"

"Trying to gather stuff fer one o' them soshological works?" asked Jerry, with evident disgust. "You better save yer wind, friend. Most of 'em will tell you that they seen better days, but as fer me, I been a crook I might say about all me life, 'cept fer a year or so."

"What did you do then?" asked the stranger.

"Oh, sorter settled down in a New England factory town and tried to be honest fer a while. Well, I did pretty fair. Went to church and all that ladylike business. Everything was goin' smooth but some monotonous, when—"

"Go on," said the stranger, and Jerry noticed that in place of the good-humored raillery was a tone of commanding sympathy, a discovery which actually made the ex-convict blush.

Then he did something which he had never been known to do before or after he had served his term. He loosened up and gave out more than ten consecutive words of his own history.

"Well, the goodness begun to pall on yours truly. You see, I wasn't cut out for that kind of business, and I sez to myself, 'Every man to his own, Jerry.' Then I lights out, accompanied by most o' the landlady's family plate.

"After working my way through the different towns I hit the metropolis, and cast in my lot with the slick ones here—and believe me, that ain't no cinch.

"I soon finds my method crude, so I sets about an improvement, and before long I ranks with the best in the pickpocket line.

Then I graduates into second-story work, and a spicy profession it is.

"One morning 'long about this time I was sittin' in my hashery waitin' fer some one to take my measure fer breakfast. My spirits wasn't what you'd call robust, considerin' I had a nerve-wrackin' job the night before and had skinned off with my bare life and a couple of teaspoons.

"I was sunk in the mud sure, when, sudden, I pipes a new dame comin' to serve me. It was a cinch she wasn't none o' your moving-picture show goddesses. Her hair reminded me somethin' of the cornsilk I used to dry fer cigarettes when I was a kid — you know — just when it begins to git dark, but some o' the glossy gold is left. She looked so innocent and neat that it made me boil inside to see some o' the gents leer at her.

"And, say, I hit it off with her fine, but I didn't have the nerve to ask her to the theayter. I would 'a' done it with one o' the blond type.

"Laugh if you like. I don't look like a lady-killer now, but I was a candy-kid then. Ten years in the pen, friend, maybe would change your phiz, too.

"It's a wonder to me I didn't git gas-houseitis, or whatever that swell name is fer stomach-trouble, the number o' feeds I stowed away in the next month.

"Well, you know how it goes in a case like that. I cut the blondes altogether, and before long I'd made the contract to pull in double harness. I was somewhat took aback when she insists on a parson hitchin' us, but I sez yes, because they wasn't nothin' I would 'a' refused that girl.

"I told her I was a detective—yes, it was a lie, but you know how it is when you get gone on a dame. Anyhow, there ain't much difference between the 'bulls' and us fellers as far as talents is concerned.

"But I wasn't satisfied, and I decided that after that one last haul I was contemplatin' I'd quit fer good. You needn't smile. I was in deep with that girl. I'd 'a' went to the electric chair fer her. I wanted the dough from the last job to pay the weddin' expenses and tide us over till I hit somethin' honest.

"You see, I'd been takin' notice of a woman, the wife of a banker, who wore the swellest array of sparklers you ever seen. She always went out in a auto with a husky shofer, so I guessed I'd have to pick the lock. I panhandled at the door and got the measure of the lock, and when everything was ripe fer the pickin' I hits the pike fer the mansion.

"All was peaceful and snoozin'. The burglar-alarms was a cinch, and the whole job was like takin' candy from a baby. I takes a gaze into the rooms down-stairs and comes to the conclusion that my loot was up where they was sleepin'.

"I primes my gun, pulls my mask down over my eyes, and, adjustin' my flasher, climbs the stairs till I comes to the bedroom I knowed was theirs.

"I c'd hear his snores plain. They sounds like the growls of one o' them hyenas up in the park. When he lets up fer a minute I kin hear her gentle, steady breathin', and somethin' begun to go wrong inside o' me. It wasn't fear, either.

"I feels my way into the room and, with my lamp, works over to the bureau. Some of 'em sparkled on top, and it was a sight fer sore eyes. I stows 'em away, and then begins to go through the drawers. I'd about put away a comfortable fortune when—

"'John,' whispers a trembly voice, 'there's a man in the room! Quick, quick, John! Wake up, for Heaven's sake!'

"I wheels about and levels me gun just as she flashed on the electric light from a switch at the head of her bed. John comes to with a snort and gazes full at me with bulging eyes.

"'Don't yell,' I sez. "I won't hurt you. Just keep your mouth tight shut while I finish this job.'

"He wasn't likely to make no resistance. Say, you should 'a' seen him. It was worse on the stomach than mustard and hot water. His fleshy face was pasty white, and the fat seemed to hang off his phiz in dead rolls. His jaw dropped and was shakin' like palsy. I walks over and feels under his pillow, but they wasn't no gun; so I ties his hands and gags him. Then I goes over to her.

"Say, but she was game. Scaret ain't no name fer it, but she keeps up her nerve, and I sez: 'Jerry, here's the man o' the house.'

"She had a fine, sweet face, and it was that face did the business with me. In my mind I seen Nellie, good and pure, and not knowin' she was goin' to marry a dirty thief.

"It must 'a' been conscience. I never had it before, and I don't want another attack—I ain't likely to git another, either. But it flashes on me that I ain't doin' right to

marry Nellie on the money I got this way. I seen then it was her or my perfession, and, bein' a man of quick thought, I decides in favor o' Nellie.

"'See here, lady,' I sez. 'Kin you keep still for a minute while I does a little explainin'?'

"'What is it?' she says, scaret but still game.

"'Well, I ain't a goin' ter rob ye. I'll put all this stuff back if you give me yer word of honor you won't make no fuss.'

"Well, I guess she thought I was crazy all right, but she gives me her word, and I believes her. Then, puttin' my gun down in easy reach, I pulls out every bit I'd taken and places it on the bed, she watchin' me all the while as though she took me for a loon.

"Thinkin' how I'd make my getaway, I spotted a Bible on the center-table. Then I got one o' them crazy inspirations a man gets when he's in a bad fix. I knowed he was a prominent church-member.

"So I picks up the Bible, and, going over to the bed, tells him I'm going to make him swear that he won't raise no fuss when I tries to beat it. He nods his head 'yes,' till I thought he'd bust his neck, and I had to give him the 'haw-haw' spite o' myself.

"Then, with my gun ready, I takes the gag out o' his mouth, so he could take the oath good and legal, and unties one o' his hands so he could put it on the book. He took the oath all right, and was glad enough to do it, but his hand shook like jelly.

"Then I tells her to switch off the light, which she done, and I slips out. I thought he was scared out of nine years' pleasure, and they wasn't any use worrying over him.

"Well, I takes off me mask, and steps cautiously into the vestibule — and right into the arms of a burly cop. Blast those burglar-alarms! I thought I'd fixed 'em.

"Well, the hubbub brought down the rest of the family, includin' a little kid about ten years old, and all the servants. I knew it was up with me, and I just cussed under my breath.

"Then I hears a swish on the stairs, and down comes the old woman in one o' them gauzy affairs slipped over her nightgown. Some one had turned up the light, and we made a fine group standin' there, the cop with me by the neck, and the two daughters huggin' each other in the corner and screamin'.

"The boy seemed to have his mother's spirit, fer he pranced round me, howlin' with delight.

"Well, the old lady, she sizes up the situation, and, turnin' to the copper, sez: 'You got the wrong man, officer. The man you have in custody is our groom. He was simply chasing the burglar. Girls,' she adds, 'go up-stairs immediately or you'll catch your death o' cold.'

"Well, the cop was a mud-head, and he looks dazed when the old lady vouches fer me. He sez, 'Yes, mum,' and was about to leggo me when from the top o' the stairs comes a voice shakin' and tremblin' with terror:

"'Don't pay any attention to her, officer. Arrest that man, I command you.'

"It was him, his hair all tousled, and his eyes staring wild.

"She turned round and give him a look, and if they wasn't contempt in that glance then my name ain't Finnegan. Well, I was pinched, all right. I didn't have the nerve to send word to Nellie.

"I didn't want her to know about me being a thief. So, fer sixty seconds a minute and sixty minutes an hour, lasting through ten years, I been eatin' my heart out thinkin' what I missed and what become o' her.

"Yes, I ain't criticizin' that man's actions, you see. I s'pose I can't expect no better treatment while I'm in this business; but—that man was a church-member."

After a moment's pause, in which his face took on a set look, he continued:

"And now I got one more job to finish, and I come back to this town just to finish it. Then I'm through. My Lord—I remember you now. You—"

The speaker had leaped from his seat and was staring with blood-shot eyes at his benefactor, who had turned pale as death and was breathing hard.

"You came into court with him, too. I remember you now, sure."

Jerry reached to his back pocket, and the muscles of his right hand and wrist bulged ominously.

The stranger said not a word.

Jerry's glance wandered from the youthful face to the remains of the meal that had just appeased his appetite.

His hand dropped to his side.

"Tell your father he is safe from me," faltered Jerry, and, turning, he walked none too steadily from the restaurant.

The Heart of Life

By

Stacy E. Baker

GRALEY, who was telling me a story, is keenly susceptible to the attention accorded his tales. My eyes, however, were upon the shambling, wizened figure of the old man at the bar. With palsied fingers he lifted the amber glass to morose, beardless lips, and, as the liquor gave luster to his dull orbs, the hawk beak beneath lifted itself slowly, uncannily.

With a peculiar noise in his throat, half gasp, half groan, the old man turned and, with tottering steps, beat a hasty retreat through the swinging doors.

I turned my marveling attention once again to Graley.

"I gave you comedy just now," rasped my friend in a hoarse, changed voice, "and I failed to hold your interest. What do you say now to a tragic bit—a red slice cut out of the bleeding heart of life?"

"Is it about the old man who just left the bar?" I put the question eagerly.

Graley shrugged his thin shoulders, and reached over and touched the button in the wall just above our table. A white-frocked waiter came hurrying.

"Two years ago," prefaced Graley, after the glasses had been brought to our niche in the *rathskeller*, "that corpse-faced old wreck you saw in front of the bar was worth in the neighborhood of a million dollars, and the father of the handsomest and most desirable girl I have ever known.

"She is gone," he added softly. His long fingers toyed with the slim shank of the thin glass.

"Thossie Le Vard," continued Graley, "was the personification of the beauty interpreted by the old Greek sculptors—tall, blond, graceful, and with great eyes as blue as a country horizon on a day in June. Old Le Vard, of French stock, was a banker, and, as the girl developed, his ambitious eyes conjured a coronet to her tawny hair and the proud look of a peeress to her classic face. She would have been a splendid acquisition to the thin-blooded aristocracy across seas—there is no denying that. But she willed otherwise.

"Unfortunately for her father's ambition, Thossie was a maid with a mind of her own, and she had no lust for a title, nor any desire to traffic her beauty and her father's millions for a broken-down château. Quite naturally, she fell in love with a common American citizen in only moderate circumstances."

Graley once more punctuated the telling of his tale with a pregnant pause, and the strange, inexplicable look came again into his eyes. I had known the man intimately for three years, but never had I seen him in this mood.

"A common American citizen," repeated my friend, "of no especial attainments or fortune, and greatly handicapped in his wooing by the hatred of the girl's father—a hatred born of a Wall Street feud between

the sire of the young man and Le Vard some twenty years before, and in which the banker had been worsted.

"Tom Grisson, the girl's lover, was not to blame for this, but Le Vard's was hot Gallic blood, and he hated the son as he had hated the father.

"Knowing this, it may also be understood that after old Le Vard found out whom his daughter loved things did not go as pleasant as hitherto at home. Thossie was motherless. There was no buffer between her and the suddenly born animosity of her masculine parent.

"Le Vard, however, after his several futile attempts to interest the girl in the nobled nonentities fluttering about the American metropolis, swung into a different channel. In spite of his vitriolic criticism of her choice in swains, he didn't forbid her the society of young Grisson, but he racked his brain for a more effective scheme of obliteration—and waited.

"Miss Thossie's favorite was a slim-shouldered, rather effeminate youth at that time, but he came of a fighting line. He might marry the maid without the consent of Le Vard if strenuous outspoken opposition presented itself. Therefore the condition of affairs demanded cunning and subterfuge.

"Recently come into Le Vard's employ was a young man from a river town some hundred or more miles away from New York, who held first-class references, and who seemed a youth after the old man's cold heart. To this fellow went the banker with a proposition.

"Slade—we will call the young chap Slade, though that isn't his real name—listened to his employer's scheme with a curious little smile occasionally twisting his thin lips. Some things Le Vard, with all his wiseness, didn't know.

"Some things, I say, Le Vard didn't know, and this was one of them. Slade had been a bank clerk in the Hudson River college town where Thossie Le Vard had finished her education. He had met the girl socially there, and had fallen madly in love with her.

"Slade was one of those dark, somber-eyed chaps who never do anything by halves. His whole heart was given the beautiful blonde, and she had seemed to reciprocate.

"Later, the swarthy youth was to learn that, if she really had loved him, the emotion had been short-lived. Eventually she refused his offer of marriage, and in a way not wholly calculated to leave Slade more than a remnant of his pride.

"Old Le Vard knew nothing of the intimacy that had existed between his daughter and his confidential secretary. He was not even aware that they knew each other. He was therefore much surprised when Slade acknowledged an acquaintance with her.

"'I know Miss Thossie,' said Slade. 'You will remember I live, when I am home, in the town where she went to college. I am quite interested in what you tell me of her love-affair. Like you, if you will pardon me, I don't believe young Grisson is a proper match for her.'

"'Then,' came from the old banker eagerly, 'you will help me? You will go to her, and—er—poison her mind against this upstart? Understand, I don't care what you say of him to her, and—and of course I will make it right with you financially—later.'

"Rejected suitors—and rejected in the manner used in the elimination of Slade—are not generally demonstrative in any affection they may yet hold toward their inamoratas.

"The confidential secretary of Le Vard frankly confessed to the girl that her father had set him to spy on her, but that she need have no fear but what he would befriend her. Young Grisson, who had never shown a keen friendship for the other man, was won by this move.

"Slade explained to Le Vard that the affairs of the two lovers were in an advanced state. He suggested a waiting game, and promised, with a sincerity and confidence that completely won over the old man, that ultimately the intimacy would be broken.

"It was following Slade's suggestion that Le Vard took up a residence in a town some miles from the big city. 'It will make very little difference to you,' reasoned Slade plausibly.

"'You rarely reach the bank before ten in the morning, anyway, and Bridgedale is within easy commuting distance. At the same time it will have a tendency to keep Grisson away from Miss Thossie, and you can give week-end parties to other young folks of your acquaintance — eligibles—thoughtfully excluding him.

"So Le Vard located in the country village of Bridgedale, and here was culminated the master scheme of Slade's—the

scheme warmed through the months and years by the little blue flame in his empty heart.

"Slade planned an elopement for his very good friends—Thossie Le Vard and Tom Grisson. He told them the true state of affairs—that there was no reason to believe that the father of the girl would ever forget that her daughter's lover was the son of his old enemy; he reviewed the old gentleman's stubbornness, his irascibility.

"Then Slade went to the father with the tale.

"'On next Thursday night,' said Slade, 'Miss Thossie and the Grisson chap will elope from Bridgedale and come on to New York and get married. I have found out all the particulars.

"'It has been agreed between the two that, in order to still suspicion among the townspeople, Miss Thossie is to dress in boy's clothes, and Grisson is to simulate a girl. Grisson is a womanish sort of fellow, anyway—slender, and all that—and with a heavy veil about his face, his disguise will be perfect. No one, of course, will know your daughter in men's clothes.'

"'I—I—' gasped Le Vard, choking with rage.

"'Take it coolly,' advised Slade. 'Remember, I have done everything I can; and perhaps, after all, it will be just as well to let matters culminate in a wedding. It's bound to eventually.'

"'What! Let the son of old Grisson marry my daughter? Why, man, you're crazy. I'll kill him first!'

"The peculiar smile on the thin lips of Slade widened as his narrowed eyes noted Le Vard's mental condition.

"On Friday evening Le Vard, a slouch-hat pulled over his eyes, skulked in the shrubbery near his Bridgedale home—and waited. Ten o'clock was the time scheduled for the elopement. There was no fear of Le Vard in the hearts of the elopers.

"Le Vard had made it plain to his daughter that he would not be home this night. The evening was particularly auspicious for an elopement. There was no moon.

"Came ten o'clock, and out of the house skulked two figures. The light from the open door conspicuously silhouetted a veiled figure draped as a woman, and a narrow-shouldered, graceful form in youth's well-fitting clothes.

"Before the door creaked shut a revolver barked. A spurt of flame lit up a distant clump of bushes, and the veiled figure pitched awkwardly forward into the arms of the other.

"In the darkness that bounded the principals in the tragedy a grim Le Vard hastened from the premises, circled the town, and, donning a false beard that he had bought for just this occasion, boldly took a car city-bound.

"There was joy in Le Vard's passion-wrenched heart. He had slain the son of his enemy—the last of a hated house.

"A telegram awaited Le Vard in the city. The yellow slip read thus, without any attempt to ease the blow:

Your daughter murdered. Come at once.

"Le Vard went home. His senses were dulled by the missive. He went as one in a trance.

"It was true. His daughter had been murdered on the veranda of her own home. Some villain in ambush had done the despicable deed. Grisson had been with her.

"Grisson himself was in much the same kind of a stupor that now thralled the father of the girl he was to have married. Suddenly Le Vard threw back his head and laughed.

"'My daughter!' he gurgled horribly. 'Why, Grisson, I thought it was you!'

"And so it came about that the blue flame in Slade's heart was quenched. There had never been any scheme of clothes exchange between the two lovers. Le Vard was not arrested. No one suspected him."

I stared across the little mission table at the narrow-eyed, thin-lipped Graley. The story was done, and yet—

Icy fingers suddenly gripped my heart.

"But you," I exclaimed hoarsely—"you know—"

Graley stared coldly across at me.

"I am tired," he averred softly. "I believe I will go home now—alone."

"Your friend is a clever tale-teller," came in the soft, insinuating voice of the waiter as he placed a filled glass before me. "Clever, sir—very."

"What do you mean?" I demanded.

"Why, sir," explained the unctuous one, three slim fingers held discreetly over his twisted lips—"why, sir, the old man as was in here early this evening, sir—the man he called Le Vard—his name is Foley, sir. He was never married."

A Flight from a Throne

By

Lillian Bennet-Thompson

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

JOHN ALLERTON, of Latin-American descent, whose grandfather in the old days was Emperor of Chilquitina in South America, has been given his *congé* by his *fiancée,* Madge Craig, who apparently throws him over because he has lost his fortune. He leaves immediately for South America, to save, if possible, the remnants of his wealth—extensive holdings in Chilquitina—though pestered by an emissary from that country, who tries to hand him an important looking blue envelope which the young man refuses to receive, throwing it out of the car window. When Allerton and his friend, Ted Norton, arrive in Chilquitina, they find the country on the verge of a revolution. Perez, the present president, is unpopular and is working very hard to oust Allerton from possession of his coffee plantation. Miguel Roberto and General Zella have formed a royalist party with the evident purpose of reinstating the old royal family. Allerton is to be emperor and to marry Marie Carlos, who is descended from the same Emperor of Chilquitina as he. Astonished and angry at this policy, Allerton denounces the scheme as idiotic, and refuses to have anything to do with it. The two natives attempt to hold him prisoner, but he announces that he is going to his plantation. A quarrel ensues and Allerton completely loses his temper, while Zella and Roberto attempt to hold him by force.

CHAPTER VIII.

FRIENDSHIP'S END.

FOR the fraction of a moment the general hesitated. Too late Allerton saw the mistake he had made in bearding the lion in his den. His mind moved with lightning rapidity.

If the general gave the order, John Allerton would simply disappear; and none would be able to say what had become of him. And Norton would share his fate. He must act now—or never!

His hand rested upon the back of his chair — a heavy, massive affair of carved wood. With a shout to Norton, he swung it high above his head and dashed it violently against the nearest window.

The flimsy blind splintered like cardboard. There was a crash of tinkling glass, a roar of rage from the *don;* and the next instant Allerton was out upon the lawn, running like a deer, with Norton close at his heels.

A glance over his shoulder showed the light gleaming through the shattered sash

This story began in The Cavalier for May.

of the window; and, even as he looked, the tall figure of the general loomed up in the aperture.

"My word of honor, Señor Allerton!" boomed the deep voice. "Remember yours!"

But Allerton did not stop. Instead, he increased his speed. It was not until they had put several blocks between them and the conspirators, and had again emerged on the avenue leading to the plaza, that he slackened his pace to a brisk walk, panting a little from his exertions.

He then haled a carriage and ordered the man to drive to the quay, before climbing into the vehicle ahead of Norton.

"Never precede royalty," he said lightly, as they started off.

Norton did not answer. His mind was busy turning over the astounding events of the evening. Allerton regarded his friend with a quizzical smile.

"Why so quiet, Ted?" he inquired.

"The general gave you his word of honor." The answer came sharply and with seeming irrelevance.

Allerton snapped his fingers.

"I wouldn't give that for his word of honor," he said contemptuously. "If we had gone back there, we should probably never have come out again alive. As it is, I've got them where I want them.

"They know I meant what I said; and they won't dare go any further with their schemes, because if Perez once got wind of their pretty little game, he'd have the whole bunch stood up for target-practise against a brick wall. The army hasn't revolted yet, and it won't without a substantial consideration; and this the revolutionists can't pay.

"The government troops may have their price — but I strongly suspect that I was counted on to foot the bills. And they always side with the one on top.

"And my charming cousin is no more fitted to be Empress of Chilquitina than I am to be King of Great Britain and Ireland. What a little noodle the girl is to be sure! I'd have given Uncle Pierre's daughter credit for better sense."

Norton frowned.

"I'm sorry to say I can't agree with you," he said. "Miss Carlos struck me as being an eminently sensible young woman — and entirely in the right in the attitude she took."

For a moment Allerton stared at his friend in blank amazement. Then he burst into a shout of merriment.

"Sits the wind in that quarter," he laughed gleefully. "Our Ted has been captured, horse, foot, and dragoons! If only some of the disappointed mamas in New York could see him now!"

Norton's frown became a scowl.

"There's nothing to laugh at that I can see," he said sullenly. "I'm perfectly willing to admit that I admire Miss Carlos greatly; and I don't in the least mind telling you that if you had been any one but the man you are, I should have resented the way you spoke to her to-night."

Allerton sobered instantly.

"My dear Ted," he said, dropping his arm affectionately upon Norton's shoulders, "you're tilting at windmills. I meant no disrespect to my cousin; but I really cannot say that I have a very high opinion of her intelligence if she swallows the very obvious bait these fellows are fishing with.

"And her claim to the throne is not as good as mine. In fact, at present she has no claim to it at all, and will never have until I die or consent to forego my rights."

"If that is the case," observed Norton, in a curious tone, "since you refuse the throne for yourself, why play dog in the manger? This Perez is evidently a rascal, not fit to be in power.

"Is there any reason why a clever, bright woman, endowed with brains and intelligence, should not rule these people wisely and well?"

Allerton shrugged.

"I don't know whether you're just thick, or whether you wilfully misunderstand me," he said. "At the first sign of civil trouble here, the Northern republic will be down on Chilquitina like a hawk on a chicken.

"She would send her troops down here, wipe Chilquitina off the map, and confiscate the estates, on the ground that I had acted in a treasonable manner.

"Hundreds of lives would be lost, property would be destroyed, fortunes would vanish overnight. The republic would lose its identity—and all for what? To gratify the greed and avarice of a few men—one of whom is not even a native of the country —who are trying to take advantage of the feminine vanity and love of power of Marie Carlos to further their own nefarious ends."

Norton looked out of the window, a satirical smile on his face.

"Very well argued," he said as Allerton paused. "But well as I know you, and as much as I've thought of you, I find it a trifle

hard to believe that you are actuated merely by a spirit of humanitarianism.

"I tell you what my candid opinion is," he went on excitedly. "You are simply afraid that if this revolution takes place, you will lose those estates—that you'll be done out of the remainder of your fortune."

For a moment Allerton did not speak. When he did his tones might have been steeped in ice.

"Thank you," he said quietly. "A life-long friendship shattered—not for the first time in man's history, by any means—for a pretty face."

He opened the door of the carriage and stepped out.

Norton made no attempt to follow.

"I'm not going across, Allerton," he said.

It was the first time in his life that he had called his friend by other than his first name.

"Drive me to the Plaza House," he added to the driver.

With a queer little smile on his lips, Allerton watched the departing vehicle until it was lost to sight in the darkness.

A man came limping up, a bloody bandage tied around his head.

"Thank Heaven, you're safe, Mr. Allerton!" he exclaimed. "I was afraid something had happened to you when you didn't show up on time. We've had an awful time here."

Allerton held out his hand.

"I'm glad to see you, Simpkins," he said. "So there's been trouble? But you're not badly hurt? Suppose we go across at once."

"I wouldn't if I were you, Mr. Allerton," the agent demurred. "If you take my advice, you'll go right aboard that steamer at Manuel again, and duck for home. It's what I'd like to do myself, only I can't leave here, and I ain't in any danger. They mistook me for you when they give me this."

He touched the bandage on his forehead.

"I came down here to settle things up, and I'm going to do it," Allerton returned.

"Better go, sir; they mean mischief, and they'll do you some hurt. I can see you on the steamer and tell you all there is to know, and you can decide what's best to be done."

Allerton shook his head with a decision from which Simpkins knew there was no appeal.

"I'm not going," he said. "That is, I'm not going until I get good and ready. We'll run across to the house now, if you're all right. Where's your launch?"

Even as he spoke, there was a yellow flash from somewhere to the right, and he felt a sharp twinge in his ear as a bullet sang spitefully by and splashed lightly into the water beyond.

CHAPTER IX.

AT HOME.

"QUICK, sir! This way!"

Allerton found himself being hurried along beside Simpkins to where a small launch bobbed at her moorings. He paused and listened intently; but no other sound came from the darkness, and in another instant the two men were in the launch and speeding across the river.

"That was a trifle too close for comfort," Allerton remarked when they were well out from the shore.

He raised his hand to his still smarting ear, and his fingers came away wet with blood.

"A trifle, sir," acquiesced Simpkins as he guided the launch on her path. "That's about the speed of these fellows—shootin' at a man's back in the dark. They'd be scared to death to meet him face to face, even if he didn't have a gun.

"And that reminds me, sir," he added. "Have you got one?"

"I've got a thirty-eight in my grip," Allerton told him. "But I didn't suppose I'd have to turn myself into a walking arsenal, or I'd have brought a suit of chain-mail along."

"I'd not be surprised if it came in handy, sir," returned the agent grimly.

The launch nosed in at the little private wharf, and Simpkins sprang out and made fast, Allerton following more slowly. His mind was busy with the problem that confronted him.

Again he saw Don Roberto's fury-distorted face, heard his low, ugly laugh, and the words: "While you live!"

Had the unknown marksman on the quay aimed an inch farther to the left, there would have been none to interfere with the plans of the conspirators; none to question the right of Marie Carlos to succeed to the throne of Chilquitina.

As he strode up the grass-grown path that led to the house, Allerton sincerely wished that he had been less in a hurry to state his position. Had he but temporized, asked for time to think the matter over, he would not

have stood in the position of danger he now occupied.

Assuredly, the twenty-ninth year of his life had been a time of bitter losses. First, his fortune; then the girl he loved—and now his best friend! And he realized that there was considerably more than a possibility that he would lose life itself.

For the first time, he thanked Heaven that Madge Craig had proved faithless. Suppose that she had married him and he had brought her here? What would have happened? Would she have sided with him in his rejection of the throne, or would its tinsel glories have appealed to her as they had to Marie Carlos? In either event, she would have been in danger; how fortunate, then, that she had not come.

"Here we are, sir!"

Simpkins was opening the door of the house, and a bright beam of light fell across the threshold.

The building was constructed according to American, not Chilquitinian, ideas of comfort, and boasted of two stories, the first consisting of living-room, dining-room and kitchen, the second of three bedrooms and bath.

The pure, clear water from a spring on the hillside was raised, by means of a windmill, to a large tank on the roof, and from there ran down to supply the needs of the household, over which stout and placid Mrs. Simpkins, assisted by several brown-skinned servants, presided.

After he had shaken hands with Mrs. Simpkins, who was unqualifiedly glad to see him, Allerton went up to his own chamber; and, after he had bathed and shaved, and put some ointment on his wounded ear, which had been deeply scored by the bullet, summoned Simpkins to the living-room.

It was a pleasant apartment, plainly, but comfortably, furnished. There were a few good pictures on the walls, and the books which filled several shelves to overflowing, had been chosen with a discrimination that implied a varied and cultivated taste.

Allerton, Sr., had frequently been heard to declare that because a man lived among heathen was no reason for becoming one of them.

The young planter flung himself into a deep leather chair, and motioned Simpkins to a seat on the opposite side of the mission-table.

"Now, then," he said. "You say things are wrong here, and I can see as much, without being told. What seems to be the main trouble?"

Simpkins shrugged his shoulders.

"Perez," he said briefly, "everything is happening that can happen. The trees are dying by hundreds, and I can't find out what ails them. They seem perfectly healthy one day, and next time I see them, they're drooping and dying.

"The crop is rotting—just rotting away. The men are crazy. And I can't find out what ails them, either. Our regular hands have cleared out, and I can't get others for love or money.

"Our last big crop was four years ago, you remember; this year's is a corker. And I can't pick it, let alone market it. I did succeed in getting a few hundred bags off the other day; but the boats never reached Manuel. They just vanished."

Allerton knit his brows, and reached for a cigarette.

"This has all started since my final refusal of Perez's offer, of course," he said. "Just before I got your last message in New York, I cabled an absolute refusal."

Simpkins nodded his head.

"Of course. And that sneakin' dago is at the bottom of the whole business, sir, you mark my words. There ain't no two ways about it. He wants this estate; and since you won't sell, he's goin' to force you out. I s'pose you couldn't see his price?"

"His price!" cried Allerton indignantly. "Why, he didn't offer a twentieth part of the value of the land alone! I might just as well have made him a present of the whole thing!"

"Yes, sir!" agreed Simpkins unexpectedly. "I guess you might. What chance have you got to fight him? You can't use his own dirty methods. All he has to do is to keep you from getting labor to handle your crop for you, kill off a few thousand more trees—and where will you be? You might just as well try to run an automobile without gasoline as to run a plantation without labor—and he knows it."

Allerton sat for a moment lost in thought. Then he bent forward toward the agent, a look of determination on his clean-cut, handsome face.

"Simpkins," he said, "back there in little old New York when the gasoline gives out, we don't leave the automobile stuck in the mud. No, sir! We get a horse and haul it home; and if we can't move it by horse-power, we get out and push!"

He brought his fist down on the table with a bang.

"And that's just what I'm going to do—get out and push! I'm not going to be frozen out, or driven out, or kicked out! I'm going to stay and see the finish of this thing. And when I get through with Perez and all his crowd, they'll wish they'd stayed at home and played with their tin-soldiers, instead of monkeying around my back-yard.

"I've got a plan, Simpkins; it came to me while I was sitting here. I haven't any idea how it'll work, but it would give Perez a bad hour or so if I can put it through. Now, I'm going to bed. I'll talk this over with you in the morning."

"But, Mr. Allerton," began the agent, "there's lots of things I ought to tell you at once."

"Let them wait until morning," Allerton said, rising. "I can give you all the time you want then, and full directions how to proceed."

Up-stairs in his own room, Allerton made his preparations for the night. Then he opened his grip and took out a thirty-eight caliber revolver.

He broke it, and made sure that five perfect cartridges were in the chambers before placing it carefully in the pocket of his corduroy riding-breeches.

CHAPTER X.

A LADY CALLS.

THEODORE NORTON was not in an enviable frame of mind as the span of mules drew the carriage swiftly through the dimly lighted streets of Hiltique.

To quarrel with Allerton had been the last thing in the world he desired to do. They had been like brothers since their knickerbocker days, and, indeed, nearer to each other than most brothers are.

They had had their quarrels as boys, their differences of opinion as men; but there had never been the slightest suggestion of rancor or ill-feeling on either side. If they could not agree, they differed; but always amicably.

Not even to himself could Norton explain the unreasoning anger that had taken possession of him when Allerton had referred to Marie Carlos as "a little noodle."

He had felt a strong desire to champion her cause from the very moment she had raised her veil in the *don's* library, and revealed to him the face which, from the instant he had seen it in the carriage on the avenue, had created in him such a desire to know its owner.

He realized that the young woman was entirely capable of taking care of herself, and standing up for her own rights. Yet she was young, and alone in a strange country, among men who were none too scrupulous; and Norton felt strongly that protection, understanding, and forbearance, not tolerant scorn and ridicule, should have been offered to her by the man to whom she was bound by ties of kinship.

Allerton's very comprehensive review of the situation, and the unpleasant consequences which he had prophesied would attend a revolution in the government, had made little impression upon Norton.

It may be that the workings of that young gentleman's mind were hampered by a vivid picture of the beautiful face of Marie Carlos, as she had hurled defiance at Allerton.

She was no ordinary girl. She was an aristocrat from the crown of her regal head to the tips of her dainty shoes. Norton could readily conceive of her occupying the exalted station of empress; but to imagine Allerton as emperor was ludicrous.

He was, as he had said, an American citizen; and no one, in his wildest dreams, would have ever supposed him to be anything else. Of course he wouldn't be emperor; he couldn't. But the attitude of "since I won't, you sha'n't," which he had assumed toward his cousin, was unreasonable and ungenerous, according to Norton's view.

The latter was rather uncertain as to how he would offer his services to the princess—the empress-to-be. Having left the house of Don Roberto in a somewhat hasty and undignified manner, he could hardly present himself at the front door and send up his card to the lady. The best way would be to write her a letter, and send it by messenger.

The carriage stopped before the gateway of the Plaza House; and after paying the driver, Norton entered and was presently shown to a room which was not nearly as uncomfortable as he had expected to find it.

He had some food sent up from the dining-room, and after eating a substantial meal, set about composing the letter which should prove to the Princess Marie that all

Americans were not surly beasts; and that one, at least, recognized her qualifications to preside over the destinies of Chilquitina.

It was not an easy letter to write; but at last it was done, and he stepped to the bell to summon a messenger to bear it to its destination.

His finger was upon the button, when a knock sounded upon the door.

"Come in!" he called; and a man's head was thrust into the room.

"A lady to see the *señor*," was the announcement.

"A lady to see me? Impossible!"

"You are Señor Norton?"

"Yes."

"A lady desires to see you at once. She is at the door—in a carriage."

"What name did she give?"

"She gave none; but she desires that the *señor* will lose no time."

"All right," said Norton. "Tell her I'll be there right away."

Who under the sun could want to see him at that hour of the night, and for what? No one but Allerton knew where he was; and if his friend had wanted to communicate with him, he would scarcely have employed a woman as messenger. Could it be possible that Allerton was in trouble or danger, and Mrs. Simpkins had come to beg for assistance? Hardly.

Completely mystified, Norton hurried down-stairs and out to the gate. A closed carriage stood in the roadway, the sleepy driver holding the reins loosely over the backs of the pair of mules, which took the places of horses in Chilquitina.

As Norton approached, a white hand opened the carriage door.

"Please get in," said a timid voice. "I don't know what you will think of me, Mr. Norton, for taking this extraordinary step, but I had to come to you; there was no one else to whom I could turn for help."

Norton hesitated. Could this be a trap? Then he laughed at his own absurd fancy. What good would it do any one to capture him? Yet the thing looked queer. Who was this strange woman, who had no one else to whom she could turn for help?

"I beg your pardon," he said courteously, "but I am not quite sure—"

"Please, oh, please!" she begged quickly. "I implore you to lose no time. Don't you know me, Mr. Norton?"

She leaned forward, and the light from the gate-lamp fell full upon her features.

Norton stood rigid in amazement. Then:

"Miss Carlos!" he gasped. "What brings you here?"

CHAPTER XI.

A KNIGHT.

"I'LL explain everything, if you can come with me for a few minutes," the girl said quickly. "I daren't stay here. Even now Señor Roberto may have discovered my absence."

Hesitating no longer, Norton entered the carriage.

"How did you know where to find me?" he asked, as the mules started off on a brisk trot down the avenue.

"I overheard the *don* talking to one of the soldiers, who told him that you had quarreled with Mr. Allerton and had left him at the wharf. So I supposed that you would go to the Plaza House, and started there, hoping to find you."

"I was just about to send you a letter," said Norton, "to tell you that I did not agree with Mr. Allerton, and that I wanted to help you if I could, and you would let me. He was quite wrong to—"

"No, no!" interrupted the girl. "He was right! All he said was true! It was I who was wrong! Oh, I have been foolish and headstrong! I can only hope that in my blindness I have not done that which will result in disaster to all of us. If you only knew what a terrible time there has been to-night!"

"Can you not tell me?" asked Norton. "Perhaps I can help you. If in any way—"

"You are so good to me!" she whispered. "So much better than I deserve! Let me tell you everything, and then you can advise me what to do."

"I'll do my best," Norton said. "Now, what is troubling you?"

"Perhaps I had better tell you how I came to be here in Chilquitina," Miss Carlos began, "so you can see what prompted me to speak and act as I did to-night.

"My father and mother are dead, you know, and for some years I have made my home with friends. I was away on a visit, however, when one evening the maid brought me a card, on which was written a message in Spanish, to the effect that if I wished to further my own interests and do a great service to my rightful country, I would grant the bearer an interview.

"Being very curious, I consented; and in the reception-room I found a man, evidently a foreigner, who explained that he came from Señor Miguel Roberto, of Chilquitina, and was the bearer of documents of importance, the exact nature of which he did not know.

"He then handed me a large blue envelope, sealed with red wax, and informing me that he would call in the morning for my answer, went away.

"The package proved to contain information substantially the same as that which General Zella gave Mr. Allerton this evening, except that no mention whatever was made of any other ruler save myself; and I was led to believe that all I had to do would be to go to Chilquitina with the messenger and be hailed as the deliverer of my suffering and oppressed country.

"I have always regarded myself as a Chilquitinian, Mr. Norton, strange as it may seem; and I think that, in spite of his English blood and training, my father felt very much the same way."

"But you knew that your cousin, John Allerton, was living, did you not?" inquired Norton. "And that he was of an older branch of the family and might also have a claim?"

"I knew that he was living, certainly," replied the girl, "but it never occurred to me that he would oppose my claim, or, indeed, know anything about the matter. Chilquitina is a small place, and a far cry from New York; and as absolutely no mention was made of my cousin in the letters, I concluded that he had nothing to do with it.

"You can imagine my surprise when he confronted me to-night in the *don's* library, and the general told us that—that—"

She hesitated and paused, flushing rosily.

"That you were to be married," finished Norton bluntly. "I think I can."

"Well," she continued, "I was so excited at the prospect of soon occupying such an exalted position, that I could not sleep that night. I dared not tell any one of the wonderful news, because the letters had said that secrecy must be observed; and so I had to keep it to myself, when I was just bursting with it.

"It made it hard for me, too, because I could ask advice of no one, and it was a momentous question for me to decide for myself, involving, as it did, my whole future life.

"When the man came next morning, I had not made up my mind, and begged him to give me another day. He said it was impossible; that he must know at once.

"And then, all of a sudden, he looked up at me with his great eyes. 'Chilquitina needs you sorely, princess,' he said. And that decided me. I pleaded urgent business to my friends, and sailed the next morning for Puerto Manuel."

"You actually left your home and traveled all that distance to a strange country on two days' notice!" exclaimed Norton incredulously.

The girl nodded.

"I may have been crazy," she said. "But he said my country needed me, and I felt that I must go. Any girl in my place would have done the same, I think.

"And, after all," she burst out passionately, "Chilquitina did not need me—did not want me. I had been told nothing but lies—nothing but lies! To think that I should have allowed myself to believe that I was going to help my country in her trouble, when, as Mr. Allerton said to-night, I was simply to be used as a catspaw, to pull some one's political chestnuts out of the fire!

"I do not deny that I was flattered—that my head was turned. Try to put yourself in my place. Suppose you had been brought up in a quiet English household; that your friends had been commonplace; your pursuits the ordinary ones of English girls.

"And then suppose, all of a sudden, some one comes to you and offers to make you the absolute ruler of an empire? Do you know exactly what you would do? Could you decide offhand?"

"I could not," replied Norton gravely, "though I dare say I should do exactly as you did. But what has caused you to change your mind? This evening you were quite determined on your course."

"After you and Mr. Allerton left to-night there was a terrible scene," she continued. "I heard the crash of the broken window, and hurried down-stairs, just in time to hear the general denouncing Roberto. It appears that the *don* had told him everything was settled, and that my cousin and I had agreed to their plans.

"The general had been away, and had left everything to Roberto, who did not expect him back so soon. For some reason which I do not understand Roberto was eager for me to ascend the throne, but did

not favor Mr. Allerton. Perhaps it was because he thought I would be more easily bent to his purposes.

"However, the general returned unexpectedly this morning, and there was nothing for Roberto to do but brazen it out when he appeared with the others at the conference."

"Everything would have been all right if Allerton hadn't lost his head and acted like a fool," growled Norton.

"You don't understand!" cried Miss Carlos. "Everything would not have been all right. Even if he had consented, I should have refused. Do you suppose I should have allowed them to marry me out of hand to a man whom I had never seen before?

"And Mr. Allerton was quite right in all he said. Even the general admitted that. He had been on a secret mission to the Northern republic to get their promise to remain neutral in the event of a civil war here."

"And he succeeded?"

"I do not know. But he told Señor Roberto that nothing could be done without Mr. Allerton's consent; and that, furthermore, even if he did agree to abdicate, the Northern republic would never permit a woman to reign.

"He said Mr. Allerton was his own master, a man, and a gentleman; and while he deplored his decision, he honored him for the reasons upon which his refusal was based. And he added very politely that the *don* was a blackleg and a rascal!"

"Whew!" whistled Norton. "That was putting it pretty plainly."

"He stamped out in a rage," continued Miss Carlos, "and the *don* swore to get even with him. I don't know what he'll do, because the Chilquitinians love the general. Even the soldiers of the president's army will do anything for him; and they hate the *don* and Perez.

"But after the general had gone—I ran back up-stairs just in time to prevent their seeing me—the *don* came to my sitting-room and told me everything was all settled; that I was to be made empress, in spite of Allerton, and that the general would settle with him.

"I became frightened; and, while pretending to believe everything, I made up my mind to run away. The *don* is determined to get rid of Mr. Allerton; I don't know how, but in some way so that the crime can never be traced to him. Your friend is in great danger, Mr. Norton, and we must warn him. Nothing will be attempted until to-morrow, though, and this gives us a little time.

"I could not stay in that dreadful house another minute. I knew of no one to whom I could appeal except you, and as soon as I found out where you were I slipped out of the back door and came to you.

"I know it was a dreadful thing to do, but I am almost distracted, and you seemed good and kind. And—oh, Mr. Norton, what shall I do? What shall I do if you fail me?"

Her voice shook, and tears started to her eyes.

Gently Norton took her hand and raised it to his lips.

"I shall not fail you, Miss Carlos," he said.

CHAPTER XII.

A NIGHT SUMMONS.

IT was a very dirty and grimy Simpkins who limped up the veranda steps as Allerton emerged from the doorway the following morning shortly after sunrise. His face was streaked with dust and smoke, his red hair powdered with ashes, charred bits of wood, and coffee-hulls. One sleeve was burned half off, and a livid strip of scorched skin showed through the tatters.

"Great Heavens, Simpkins! What has happened to you?" exclaimed Allerton in dismay.

The agent managed a rueful grin.

"They tried to burn the mill down, sir," he explained. "I thought the dirty sneaks were likely to try some such trick, and I was layin' for 'em. I hit one, I think, but I can't be sure.

"I had my hands full putting out the fire, and I didn't have time to chase 'em up. How they ever got in when I was watchin' I don't know; but they had a tidy little fire going when I spotted it."

"You suspected something of the sort, and never said a word to me?" Allerton said sternly.

Simpkins grinned again.

"I didn't see it was necessary," he said. "I figured I was more'n a match for a dozen of 'em, and I didn't want to take chances on your getting hurt. I knew you'd want to be in it, if I told you."

He scratched his head with a stubby forefinger, and started for the door.

"Was the damage to the mill serious?" asked Allerton.

"No; but if I hadn't put out the fire when I did, we'd have another crimp in our chances."

Plunged in thought, Allerton walked to the top of the steps and stood looking out over the beautiful estate.

For miles and miles, on three sides, farther than the eye could reach, stretched his own domain.

About twice the height of a man, their glossy leaves contrasting harmoniously with the clusters of crimson berries that nestled close to the stems, countless thousands of coffee-trees stood in rows like files of well-disciplined soldiers of the plant world.

If asked to estimate their number, Allerton could not have done so with accuracy. At a rough guess he would have said a million and a half, and then fallen far short of the actual figures.

No wonder Perez coveted the plantation; no wonder that Chilquitina cast jealous eyes upon the Northern republic, and murmured that so much of the valuable land had been filched from her on pretense of correcting a boundary-line.

No wonder Allerton had refused to sell the land for the pitifully small sum Perez had offered, and determined to scheme and plan—to fight, if need be—for the estate which had been the property of his family for generations.

And yet, what could he do? On the face of it, Perez held all the trumps in the game. Undoubtedly he had bribed or intimidated the men until they had refused to work under Simpkins, who now had barely twenty hands to do the work that would require hundreds.

Perez, too, had been responsible for the dying off of the trees, the disappearance of the cargo boats, and the incendiarism at the mill—which, had it succeeded, would have destroyed Allerton's last chance of gathering and marketing his crop.

Of the instigator of the attempt on his own life Allerton was not quite so positive as he had been the night before. Then he had felt convinced that Roberto was at the bottom of it, coming so soon as it had after the latter's threat. But, in the light of what he had since learned, the young man believed it was quite as likely to have been inspired by Perez.

At any rate, it was unpleasant, not to say distressing, to have people taking pot-shots at one in the dark; and from Simpkins's statement in regard to the wound he himself had received, a previous essay had been made to cut short the young planter's earthly career.

"But I'm not ready to take up a permanent residence in the happy hunting grounds just yet," Allerton told himself, with a determined setting of his square jaw. "Not by a lot! And I'm not ready to leave Chilquitina, nor yet to set up as an emperor.

"I own this place, and I propose to stay here and do as I like, in spite of Perez and Roberto and Zella and my foolish young cousin."

The thought of the girl recalled the quarrel, if such it could be called, with Norton. Allerton could scarcely upbraid himself for having brought it about. How, he asked himself, was he to know that Ted was going to be idiot enough to range himself as her defender and champion?

She had gone headlong into this scheme of a reestablished empire, without considering where her precipitation might lead her; and she had refused to listen to reason, logic, or anything else. And Norton had apparently plunged after her into the quagmire of plot and counterplot. It only remained to hope that they would both get out without bodily injury.

It was strange how a slip of a girl could twist a seemingly rational man round her little, useless finger, making him see things in a false, distorted light—making him do wild, insane things which normally would never have occurred to him.

Until now Ted Norton had been immune. Women had never appealed to him; he had scarcely liked them. Even Madge Craig—but Allerton did not care to think of Madge Craig. Abruptly he clamped his hat on his head, and, calling Simpkins from the house, started down to see what damage had been done to the mill, and to inspect such portions of the estate as lay within the radius of a few miles.

The sun was setting in a transfigured west when he returned, not a little discouraged and downhearted.

Matters were even worse than Simpkins had pictured them. The number of dead and dying trees was appalling; and the others were likely to suffer sadly from lack of attention.

Yet he might as well have attempted to bail out Lake Superior with a tin dipper as to gather the swiftly ripening berries with the few faithful helpers who remained. Ordinarily the case would have been bad enough; but, with a bumper crop on the trees, and every promise of fine weather conditions, things were almost desperate. It looked, indeed, as if he would have to come to terms with Perez or face utter and absolute ruin.

"But I won't!" he declared vehemently. "Simpkins, I'll let every tree rot in the ground and go back to New York and sell papers on Times Square before I'll see that sneaking rascal have a foot of my ground!"

Simpkins wisely made no reply. He knew the futility of argument, yet his mind misgave him.

Clearly Allerton was running a grave risk in remaining on the plantation under the ban of the president's displeasure. Perez was not a scrupulous man, in any sense of the word. Had the little agent, however, known that Roberto also felt aggrieved, it is quite possible that panic would have seized him; but, true to his promise to the general, Allerton had made no mention of the imperialist plot to make him emperor, and Simpkins was thus happily ignorant of the double peril.

The swift tropical twilight was falling over the land when Allerton, refreshed by his bath and dinner, again went out upon the veranda. He wanted to think out a solution of the difficult situation in which he found himself.

Simpkins was too full of impossible suggestions to be of much assistance, and the "plan" which Allerton had told him he had in mind was merely a subterfuge to keep him from coming out with them at all times and places.

The young planter wished that Norton had been less hasty in his judgment, or that he himself had been less ready to take umbrage and acquiesce in his friend's hot-headed action. Yet — and there was the rub!—Norton had deserted him at a critical time—a crisis in his fortunes; and he was more hurt by the defection than he cared to admit even to himself.

It was one of those wonderful nights that visit the countries of the tropics. The air, intensely hot all day, had cooled after sundown, and a light breeze had sprung up, rustling through the curtaining vines of the veranda and whispering among the coffee-leaves.

The moonlight fell in silver patches across the grass, on which grotesque shadows danced to the rhythmic movements of the wind.

Allerton dropped into a bamboo lounging-chair, and closed his eyes wearily. He had hoped for so much—and he had lost all! On just such a night as this he had dreamed of Madge Craig in the deep chair close beside his own. He had pictured the play of the moonlight on her soft hair, the gleam of her dark eyes as they looked into his own.

In fancy he had felt the warm clasp of her hand in his, and heard her voice—those low, musical tones that thrilled him through and through as no other woman's voice had ever done—as no other woman's voice could ever do.

And it was all a dream—a beautiful, impossible dream. Madge was in New York now, no doubt, surrounded by a circle of other moths who would, sooner or later, singe their wings at the candle of her beauty. She had probably forgotten all about John Allerton, the man she had once promised to marry because of his wealth, and whom she had incontinently thrown over when fortune turned her face from him.

But, oh, how he wanted her He had tried to forget her; he had told himself that she was not worthy, that she was heartless, insincere. He would put her out of his mind, his life, and think of her no more. Useless! Of her own accord she had gone out of his life; but her face was always before him, rising between him and the plans he tried in vain to formulate.

And there, in that quiet solitude, he realized as never before how much she had meant to him. Why should he strive for wealth, when she would never share it with him? She—

"*Señor!*" The sibilant whisper cut sharply through the drowsy silence.

He opened his eyes, but no one was in sight.

"*Señor!*" came the voice again. "Here! this way!"

The vines at the side of the veranda were parted, and a brown hand was holding a white paper through the curtain of leaves.

In some surprise, Allerton reached out and took it, stepping to the edge of the steps, where the moonlight fell brightest,

as he broke the wax that sealed the flap of the envelope.

He ran his eye quickly down the page. Then a low exclamation burst from him, and he reread the missive from beginning to end.

"Great Heavens!" he said slowly. "Madge! Here!"

His hands fell to his sides, and he stood staring unseeingly before him.

"The boat is waiting, *señor,*" said the messenger.

Allerton turned with a start.

"What's that?" he said.

"The boat is waiting near the foot of the path. Make no noise; there is danger."

"Very well," Allerton said with sudden decision, tucking the letter away in his innermost pocket. "Wait one moment, until I tell—"

"Quick! Some one comes!" The man slipped noiselessly around to the foot of the steps. "Every moment is precious! Even now we may be stopped! Come quickly!"

Footsteps sounded on the path that led to the wharf, muffled by the grass, but perfectly audible in the tropical stillness. Allerton hesitated but an instant. If he stopped to tell Simpkins where he was going, he might not be allowed to go. Treachery lurked in every shadow.

Madge had said that he was in danger; but that was no news to him. All he cared for at that moment was that she wanted him; she had sent for him! How or when she had come, he did not know, nor did he stop to think. She was in Hiltique; she had summoned him, and he must go to her. She wanted him—wanted him! A smile curved his lips.

He stepped quickly from the veranda, and stole around the corner of the house. A man stood there, dressed in the uniform of the republic. Silently they glided along through the trees to the river bank.

They stepped into a small skiff and pushed off, just as Ted Norton and Marie Carlos mounted the piazza steps and knocked upon the door. It was opened by Simpkins.

"Where is Mr. Allerton?" demanded Norton, without preamble.

"Isn't he here? He was sitting in that chair not ten minutes ago." Simpkins came out of the house, and looked round the deserted veranda.

"Well, he isn't there now," Norton said impatiently. "Where do you suppose he is? I must see him at once! He is in great danger!"

"Lord, sir, he knows that!" Simpkins hastened to say. "But he can't be far off. Probably he's just gone for a little stroll. It's such a lovely night. He'll be right back. If the lady will just sit down, I'll look for him, and tell him you're here, Mr. Norton."

"No," said Miss Carlos; "I'll go with you and help look for him. We must find him as soon as possible. I—I—I think I am a little frightened for him."

"Bless you, miss!" Simpkins said reassuringly, "he's all right. He wouldn't go far away from the house to-night. You'll see—he'll be along in a minute."

But dawn broke ruddily over the hills; and Allerton had not returned.

CHAPTER XIII.

A LOVER'S MEETING.

"WHERE are you to take me?" asked Allerton, as the boat neared the opposite bank of the river.

"The *señorita* is staying in a house just back of the plaza," was the low reply. "Make no noise, *señor.* Do not talk. We must not be discovered."

They landed at what appeared to be a private wharf; and for a long half-hour Allerton followed his guide through the mazes of the city's back streets. At last they emerged upon a wider roadway, in a locality unfamiliar to the American.

Presently the man turned in the gateway of a rather imposing house, and ascending the steps, rang the bell. The door was almost immediately opened, revealing a long, dimly lighted hall that seemed to run the entire length of the house.

Evidently the visitor was expected, for before the American could speak the servant who had opened the door flung wide another at the left of the hall, and Allerton found himself standing alone in a magnificently appointed room. Costly rugs lay upon the polished floor; rare bronzes and exquisite porcelains stood on pedestals; a few fine paintings hung upon the walls, which were beautifully carved and decorated.

It seemed to the young man that presently he must awake and find that the whole adventure had been another dream, a vision

conjured up in his brain as he sat on the moonlit veranda at the *fazenda*.

He stood in the middle of the floor, lost in wonder. Madge Craig, the girl he loved, and whom he had imagined hundreds of miles away, was here, in this very house! And she had sent him a letter, urging him to come to her at once! It was too strange to be credible.

"Jack!"

He started at the familiar sound of the sweet, low voice.

"Madge," he said simply; and, turning, went toward her with outstretched hands. With a gesture of surrender, she laid her own within them; and then looked up at him shyly. In another instant his arms were around her, and his eager lips sought hers.

"Madge!" he said again brokenly. "Sweetheart!"

She did not speak, only laid her head on his shoulder, with a little sigh of happiness. Presently he held her away from him, devouring her with his eyes. She had not changed; she was just the same dear girl he had known. Perhaps a little paler, a little graver; but the love-light was there in the sweet, dark eyes; the same tender smile hovered about the red lips; the dusky hair waved back from the low, white forehead in that piquant fashion he loved so well.

He did not ask her if she cared for him, did not question her. She had sent for him; that was enough; and he could read the message of her heart in her eyes.

"Mother has gone out of the city for a day or two," she said presently, after they had seated themselves on a low divan at one end of the room.

On either side of them a full-length portrait was set into the carved paneling of the wall; a portrait of a beautiful woman with smiling lips and sad eyes. The pose and treatment of each was different, but the subject was the same, and each was a masterpiece.

"And you are here alone?" Allerton asked.

"No; the *señora* is chaperoning me. We arrived only last night. Mother had some business in Hiltique, and I—well, I wanted to come, too."

"Why?" Allerton asked her smilingly. "Why did you want to come?"

She lifted her eyes to his for an instant, then dropped them again.

"Because—because I wanted to see you, Jack. I wanted to have things set right between us. I—I have been unfair to you, Jack. My brother Cecil told us of a girl in Philadelphia—oh, I know I was ungenerous, that I should have trusted you! But I was hurt that you should even give any one grounds for gossip, as long as you were engaged to me; I was jealous, I think, and when you came to Boston, I—I—"

"Refused to see me."

"No; I didn't do that. I wanted to see you, but mother thought better not. She said it would be undignified; that if you cared so little for me that you would allow your name to be coupled with that of another woman, it was time she interfered. I was weak enough to allow her to see you first; and when I came down-stairs you had gone. I was so hurt and angry, and—"

"You should have known me better, Madge," Allerton said gravely. "There was no girl in Philadelphia, of course. Indeed, I have no more than the most casual acquaintance with any woman in the city, with the exception of Miss Fairfax. It should be unnecessary for me to have to defend myself to you, Madge, and I am not going to do it."

"Miss Fairfax was the girl," Madge told him in a low voice.

"Indeed! It happens that the lady was my first teacher—when I was a little shaver! I have always been very fond of her, and now that she is getting old and a little feeble, she likes to have me come and see her sometimes."

"Jack! Forgive me!"

"There isn't anything to forgive, Madge, except that I've wanted you every minute since your mother sent me away. I've suffered tortures of loneliness for you. And you have something for which to forgive me. I thought it was because I'd lost most of my money that you were throwing me over."

"Lost your money, Jack? But you haven't—or, at least, you're going to get it all back again right away, aren't you? That is, I mean—"

"It's quite true, dear. I'm not exactly a pauper yet, although from the looks of things, I'm quite likely to be."

"But mother said—" began the girl; and then checked herself. "Well, I can't tell you what she said," she finished somewhat lamely, "because she told me not to mention it yet. But I know all about it."

"Then you know more than I do," Allerton said cheerfully. "However, it doesn't matter. Nothing matters very much just now, except you and me. Little girl," he went on, and there was a tender thrill in his voice, "a few hours ago I didn't care whether I had anything left or not. I'd lost what I valued more than all the money in the world—you!"

He tightened his arm about her; but she drew back.

"What's that you have in your coat?" she said.

Allerton put his hand into his pocket, and then laughed.

"Only a revolver," he said. "I slipped it in my coat because it didn't fit in the hip pocket of my trousers; I'd forgotten I had it."

The girl shuddered.

"Please put it down," she said apprehensively. "No, not there!"—as he would have returned it to his pocket. "Put it on the table, do! I'm afraid of firearms. Please!"

With another laugh at her fancy, he laid the weapon on the table that stood in the center of the apartment, and then came back to her side.

"I haven't much to offer you now, dear," he resumed, "but at least we sha'n't starve. And if you'll take me, just as I am, I'll work for you with the last drop of blood there is in me. I'm not down and out yet, by a good deal.

"Why, Madge"—and he chuckled—"do you know I might have been absolute ruler of a country, if I'd wanted to be?"

The girl sprang up suddenly and clasped her hands.

"There!" she said. "I'd forgotten all about it! I was so excited over seeing you again that I never thought to tell you why I sent for you to-night."

"Why you sent for me?" repeated Allerton. "Wasn't it because you wanted to see me?"

"Yes; but there was another reason. President Perez—"

"Will speak for himself!" interrupted a new voice.

Allerton wheeled quickly on his heel in the direction from which the sound came, and a cry of astonishment broke from his lips.

The portrait at the right of the divan had swung noiselessly out from its place, revealing an aperture in the wall, from which stepped out José Perez, president of the republic of Chilquitina!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BLUE ENVELOPE AGAIN.

THE president bowed so low that the lamplight shone on the top of his sleek, well-oiled head. Then he straightened up again, smiling ingratiatingly; and when he spoke his voice reminded Allerton of the purring of a cat.

"Miss Craig, the *señora* is waiting. If you will be so good as to spare Mr. Allerton to me for a few moments, I shall be always grateful. I have, as you know, something I wish to say to him. I will not detain him long—merely a small matter of business which we can discuss in a very short time. I have come over from the palace on time, have I not? Permit me!"

Before Allerton could speak, he had stepped to the door and opened it.

Madge hesitated.

"Don't be long, please," she said prettily; and, with a smile at Allerton, passed from the room.

The president closed the door after her, and then turned back to Allerton, watching the American as a cat watches a mouse.

And then, with a bound, he was at the table and had possessed himself of the revolver which lay there.

"Now," he said, "we can talk."

"Individuals of your sort usually need to have a gun in their hands before they can muster sufficient courage to speak to a man," Allerton observed cuttingly.

He drew out a cigarette, lighted it, and seated himself again on the divan, leaning back with an assumption of indifference.

"Now," he said, "talk, by all means. I am quite comfortable."

The president laughed sneeringly.

"I hope that during your brief residence here you will continue to remain so," he said. "I will proceed, however, with what I have to say to you, for I am a busy man, and my time is limited."

Allerton nodded.

"Go ahead," he said carelessly.

The president drew forward a chair with one hand, keeping the revolver carefully trained upon Allerton with the other.

"I suppose you are wondering why I asked Miss Craig to send for you," he began. "Or perhaps she did not tell you that

the note you received was written at my suggestion?"

Allerton repressed a start.

"It's a matter of indifference to me," he said with a wave of his hand.

"Be that as it may," went on Perez, "believe me, I had my reasons. Last night two ladies arrived in the capital. I had the honor of knowing them, and they were kind enough to accept the offer of my humble hospitality during their sojourn.

"By a strange trick of fate, they had become possessed of a package of papers, which contained information of incalculable value to me. It appears that the papers were enclosed in a blue envelope, sealed with much red wax"—this time Allerton's start was perceptible, and was not lost on Perez—"and had been thrown from the window of an express train, just outside the town of New London, in the State of Connecticut, the United States.

"It so happened that a man found this envelope, which was addressed originally to one Señor Juan Allerton, in New York. The New York address had been crossed out, however, and on one corner was written the name of Señora Louisa Craig, the address Boston.

"The man took the envelope to the *señora*, who, after consulting with her daughter, brought it to me. Treason was rampant in the pages; and though no name was signed to the communication, it was unnecessary for me to know the identity of the writer in order to foil the plot. It was merely essential that I should place the addressee under arrest.

"It promised to be difficult, however, to secure him. In my dilemma, I sought the help of the Señorita Madge, and she consented to aid me by sending to this Señor Allerton a note which should bring him to this house, and by detaining him after his arrival until I should be able to come through the passage from the palace.

"Everything has worked out exactly as we planned. You are here—in my power. I have in my possession evidence of your treasonable conspiracy with residents of this republic to overthrow the present government and establish an empire. This is a capital offense; such is the law. And the law—also the prisoner—shall be executed. Is there anything you wish to say?"

The president smiled to himself over his ghastly joke, and repeated:

"Have you anything to say?"

"Only this," said Allerton quietly. He was very pale, but the fingers that applied a fresh match to his cigarette were perfectly steady. "Only this—that you are a liar!"

The president's face became livid with rage; but he rose and bowed mockingly, his hand over his heart.

"My sense of hospitality prevents my exacting satisfaction at once for those words," he said. "But you shall pay for them later on. In the meantime, I have but one more thing to tell you. You are pleased to believe that the *señorita* would not have done this for me—is it not so? You think she would not have delivered you into my hands. That is why you say I lie to you. Yes?

"Think a moment! Did she not cleverly deprive you of this?"

He tapped the revolver with a long yellow forefinger.

"Did she not bring the papers to me, knowing that they would mean your arrest? Is not treason always punishable, in no matter what country, and is not the penalty always a severe one?

"Did she not know this? Did she not write the note that would bring you here—to my house? Did she not— Bah! It is useless to go on! Why should she have done all these things, I ask you?"

"Why, indeed?" said Allerton lazily.

"Because she has promised to become my wife!"

Allerton stiffened suddenly in his seat, but made no comment. The president laughed a little; and then, still keeping his prisoner covered, stepped to the door and rapped sharply.

It opened, and a half-dozen soldiers filed into the room. They were dressed exactly the same as those whom Allerton had seen in the library of Señor Roberto, except that the imperial crown was missing from their sleeves.

"Take him!" commanded the president.

Allerton rose as the soldiers surrounded him. Resistance was useless; they were too many. He was pale, but perfectly master of himself, as he turned to Perez.

"I am a citizen of the United States," he said quietly, "and I demand to see the American consul."

"You will be shot at dawn, *señor*," was the president's reply.

"And you and your thirty-cent republic will be blown out of the water shortly afterward," Allerton told him spiritedly.

"Hardly, *señor*. The United States can make no war for a cause of which she has never heard. Remove him, sergeant. At dawn—in the court of the Black Steps!"

Handcuffs snapped upon Allerton's wrists. He made as if to speak, then shrugged his shoulders and smiled—a strange, wan smile, that was infinitely sad.

"Forward—march!" ordered the sergeant; and the little procession moved through the doorway.

At the rear of the hall another door stood open, revealing a yawning passage, and guarded on each side by a soldier with fixed bayonet.

As Allerton reached the foot of the staircase that led to the second story he raised his eyes and beheld Madge Craig standing on the landing, one hand clutching the banisters, the other pressed to her throat.

The girl leaned forward, with white cheeks and wide, terrified eyes.

"What have I done?" she whispered with dry lips. "What have I done?"

Allerton bowed gravely and lifted his hands a little, that she might see the manacles upon them.

"You have succeeded absolutely, Miss Craig," he said. "Which may, or may not, be a source of future satisfaction to you."

"Go on, *señor*," said the sergeant impatiently.

With head erect and shoulders thrown well back, Allerton passed down the corridor with his escort, and disappeared beyond the narrow door, which clanged behind him.

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE DUNGEON.

"HAVE a care, *señor*," cautioned the sergeant gruffly. "The way is steep!"

They were descending an apparently interminable flight of stone steps that went down, down, down, until it seemed to Allerton that they must be miles beneath the earth's surface.

He remembered vaguely having heard his father speak of the Black Steps—they led to the cells cut deep in the solid rock of the hillside, where dangerous criminals were confined, in almost total darkness, in the days before Manuel II abolished such an inhuman punishment.

Truly, Perez must consider his present prisoner a menace, if he thought it necessary to requisition the black cells!

The lantern in the hands of the foremost soldier glimmered ghostlike on the bare walls; the measured tread of booted and spurred feet echoed and reechoed through the rocky passage.

The steps came to an end, and they passed through a semicircular court. It was the court of the Black Steps—the place of execution. Against yonder wall many a brave man had stood and faced the leaden messengers of death. The roof was low; the surrounding walls evidently were formed by natural means, although the stairs and cells had probably been made by native workmen.

"Halt!"

The sergeant unlocked and opened a grated door, motioning Allerton to step into a narrow room, hewn out of the rock. One of the soldiers lighted a lantern and set it upon the ground.

"It will burn as long as you need it, *señor*," observed the sergeant. "You will have time for a little quiet meditation before dawn."

He unlocked the handcuffs, stepped back and shut the grating.

"About—face! Forward—march!" The footsteps retreated and died away in the echoing distance.

A wooden bench stood against the wall at the back of the cell. Like a man in a dream, Allerton walked to it and seated himself, his eyes fixed on the tiny beam of light cast by the lantern on the floor.

In the passageway a bat winged heavily by. The drip of moisture from the damp walls and his own breathing were the only other sounds that came to the ears of the prisoner.

He was to be shot at dawn—shot down like a dog, in a dark, underground court, with no blessed gleam of sunlight; never again would he hear the voices of his friends; never again would he clasp a comrade's hand.

Somehow, the knowledge possessed no particular terror for him. It did not matter very much. There were some things worse than death. And one of these had come to John Allerton, when he realized that he had been trapped and betrayed by the woman he loved.

At one blow, Perez would rid himself of a dangerous political enemy; he would render his grip upon the republic secure, and

he would remove from his path the only obstacle to his possession of the Allerton estates.

But Madge—what was her object? What had she gained? What would she benefit by his death? He was doing her no harm; he had bowed in obedience to her decision and left her, to trouble her no more. But she had summoned him back; she had met him with sweet words and tender looks—and had then sent him forth to die, against a blank wall, at the hands of a firing squad.

Why?

A terrible thought flashed through his mind, turning the blood to ice in his veins. The president had said that she was to become his wife. Whatever, therefore, was gained by Perez, would also be to her advantage! She would be the wife of the highest and most powerful official of the republic—she would have wealth—

But Allerton put away the thought as unworthy of her and of himself. No one, short of a human fiend, could or would do such a thing. What woman knowingly could send a man to a shameful, ignominious death for the sake of material gain? No! Perez must have lied to her.

Perhaps he had told her that the American would be imprisoned for a short time, or banished; there were a hundred plausible tales that he might have invented. Doubtless she would never know the fate to which she had consigned her discarded lover. Allerton prayed that she might be spared the awful knowledge.

He recalled the terrified expression on her face as she had leaned on the stair-rail. Her voice was in his ears, whispering: "What have I done? What have I done?"

Poor child! She knew not what she did!

Child? And yet what a consummate actress she was! Whatever her belief in his ultimate fate, she had perjured her womanhood! She had yielded herself to his arms; her head had lain on his breast; she had returned kiss for kiss. And all the while she was scheming to get his revolver away from him, to render him harmless, that she might deliver him up to Perez.

She had played with him, tricked him, befooled him at every step, relying on his love for her to blind him to the artful subterfuge, doubtless laughing in her sleeve at his very pliability! And he, poor fool! had thought that she loved him!

He dropped his head in his hands, and groaned aloud; but not in fear, not in terror of the ordeal so soon to come.

Death? What was that? One has to die some time. The great reaper comes to us all; and when he calls, there is none who can disobey the summons. A handkerchief bound over one's eyes; one's hands perhaps tied. The order: "Ready! Aim! Fire!" and it would be over.

No; it was not the dread of death that wrung his heart; it was the lost love, the shattered illusion, the broken idol.

Clever Perez!

He had used the one means in the world to get his enemy into his power! Perhaps even now he was telling Madge Craig how neatly she had managed the coup. He had reassured her, of course; there was nothing for her to be frightened about. The man was all right; only they had had to shackle him because he made such a fuss. He was out of the way, and would not trouble them.

Clever Perez!

And clever Madge!

How naturally she had acted! With what sweet surrender she had put her arms round the neck of the man she was deluding! How lovely she had looked! The dark, waving hair; the slender, white-gowned figure—her eyes—ah, how her eyes had lied!

The dawn could not be far away now. Then this fiendish mental torture would be ended; everything would be ended, and he would be at peace. When everything life had to offer had been snatched from him, why regret the loss of life itself? And she had taken all—all.

Yet he could not hate her. A great pity welled up in his heart; pity, that one so young and beautiful should be so deceived. What would her life be with Perez? What could her mother be thinking of, to give her daughter to such a monster?

Allerton clenched his hands.

"And I cannot help her!" he murmured. "I cannot help her!"

For himself, he did not care. It had been hard at first to go on, after he had given her up, even when he knew her to be cold, scheming, heartless.

But to meet her again, to think her possessed of all the virtues with which he had endowed her at the beginning of their intimacy, and then to be disillusioned for the second time—

And where was Ted Norton? Had he repented of his hasty words and action?

Or was he to be the victim of another clever, unscrupulous woman? What would he do when his friend did not return? What would Simpkins do? What would they all do and say? Only he—Allerton—would be past all speech and action. They would never find him; never know his fate. He had gone from among them in the night, and the darkness would never give him up.

The lantern flickered, and went out with a little sputter. In the thick darkness there was no sound, but the drip, drip, drip of the water from the walls.

He rose and began to pace back and forth in the narrow cell. The sergeant had said that the lantern would burn as long as he needed it. But little time, then, must now elapse before dawn came and the soldiers' rifles put an end to the agony of mind and brain.

"Madge!" he whispered. "How could you, dear?"

There came a faint sound from the distance. Nearer—nearer—the tread of feet!

They were coming for him now.

In five minutes all that was left of John Allerton would be thrust into a hastily scooped ditch, and left to molder to dust.

He shut his hands, so that the nails dug into the palms; then he shook his shoulders and raised his head proudly.

He would show them that the blood of Manuel II had not deteriorated in its admixture with American.

He would show them how an American gentleman can die, if need be.

A light glimmered around the turn in the passage.

He turned and sat down quietly upon the wooden bench.

(To be continued.)

The Wrong Start

By *Paul Crissey*

McCALL had finally been caught in the game of the "Street." The pendulum of Fate caught him on one of its backward swings, and left him trembling and acutely aware that something must be done quickly.

Behind the teller's cage in the bank he could see the half-open door of a private office. Before him lay the great floor of the bank—and, nearer still, the strong brass bars of the window.

Vaguely he wondered, with distaste, as he rubbed his eyes, whether those bars stood for something in his future.

His drawn face, tired eyes, and nerveless hands marked him as a man carrying a burden.

At this thought he laughed—laughed until a steady metallic click stopped the laugh and changed it to a growl.

"What a place for a ticker!" he muttered to himself. "In a bank!"

There was a sneer in the words, in the tone, and in the workings of his face as he spoke.

He turned and looked through the back door of his cage into the room beyond. He could see the sun of late afternoon touch gently with golden fingers upon the glass dome of the ticker; he could hear the steady breathings of that instrument, and could see, by twisting his head still more, the jerking tape as it spun out from under the delicate wheels of the instrument.

Long and snakelike, the thin ribbon of paper filled the waste-basket to overflowing and curled through the meshes of that tall receptacle. Even the basket itself was in the toils of the "voice of the Street."

McCall shuddered, and brought his gaze back to the big magnificence of the bank. Why was there so much money?

His hand—a white, soft hand—suddenly reached out and caressed row upon row and tier upon tier of greenbacks.

Suddenly the man heard his name called. Mechanically he dropped the slide of his window and locked the cage door behind him.

He was tired—very tired. In his narrowed, strained eyes lay the story of sleepless nights, of ceaseless worries, and of a great distrust—not of the world or of humanity, but of himself.

McCall was afraid of himself.

The carpet on the floor of the president's office was soft and rich, and the teller's feet sank into its rich embrace. For a moment the simple magnificence of the room, the cool, unperturbed look of the bank officer, sent envious blood pounding through the man's veins. A cool voice was speaking from a distance somewhere.

"Sit down, McCall," the president said; "I wanted to have a talk with you for a minute or two." He looked the teller square in the eye, and the look, firm though tired, was returned. For a moment the president hesitated.

Possibly, he thought, he had mistaken the signs he had read in the last few days.

"Now, what's the matter, McCall?" he asked. "Have you gone broke—or what's wrong? Your health?"

For a moment only the man hesitated, then he answered slowly:

"My wife has been wanting to send the girl off to school. I want to, too, but I can't. It's the first real thing I have had to refuse. I can't stand the pace!"

"Have you been tampering with the stocks?"

The president spoke slowly, surely, feeling his way into the teller's secrets.

"I buy a little once in a while," he confessed, "but I buy outright."

"How has the market treated you?" asked the president.

"The last stocks I bought," answered McCall slowly and deliberately, "went the way I expected them to."

If there was irony in his tone, the president gave no sign of noticing it.

McCall breathed more easily. He had not lied, he assured himself. Against his better judgment he had bought that last block of stock. Down in his heart he had known they would amount to nothing—and he had been right.

It was the grip of the game, the fascination for playing with fire, that had made him buy on the already high market. And he had lost.

He wanted to laugh—would have laughed had it not been that the president was speaking again.

"You've been nervous," he was saying abruptly. "Now get down to earth again. I'll see about a raise in salary for you—perhaps a little holiday. But you must brace up while you're here."

That was all. In an instant a wave of relief swept over him. He left the room and went back to his narrow cage. Had he fooled the cool, deliberate man in the big room beyond?

"Of course I didn't," McCall groaned. "He knew—knew all the time."

Ruefully the teller took out his personal bank-book—it was pitiful—the remainder of his savings for years wiped out in a few minutes by the merciless, mysterious hand of Fate which, during its lifetime, had caught at rich and poor alike and dragged them down—down into—

But McCall refused to think. Dully he knew, and realized that he must do something quick. Banking hours were over. The tellers were figuring up their totals, McCall among them.

He watched the stream of money. The rustle of bills being counted under rapid fingers filled the room, and McCall laughed at the irony of it.

Late that night his wife found him studying a great law-book. She looked up in surprise, and laughed at his serious face.

For a moment his eyes burned with a queer fire. He laid the book aside, and, holding her hand, told her of plans he had made for the future.

"I'm going to Europe," he managed to say in a voice that shook. "I have a chance—a great chance to make a lot of money in two years if I go. It would put us on our feet, and probably"—he smiled at her—"probably get back some of my lost good health."

For a long time the little woman was silent. She stared blankly before her. At last, with a sob, she buried her head on his shoulder.

"I'm selfish," she whispered. "I don't want you to go. But you will, John, won't you?"

As a woman will, she smiled through her tears and kissed him.

It was settled. McCall breathed more easily as he left next morning, suit-case in hand, to make some purchases of clothes and other necessities.

"Will you tend to these, dear?" his wife had said as she handed him a package of papers.

"What are they?" he asked.

"Bills, dear," his wife answered, laughing. "It's the first of the month, you know."

But it wasn't clothes that McCall bought. Instead, after the bank had closed, he sought an office high up in one of the big buildings, where an old school friend worked. For upward of an hour they talked, and at the end of that time the friend left for a deposit-bank. McCall had started the ball rolling.

For three days, ending with Saturday, he carried his suit-case to the office. He was going away—maybe—he told his friends in the bank; and he watched their envious glances, tired as his own, with a new-born interest.

Late Saturday afternoon he left the bank, his suit-case heavy with his new purchases. Straight to his friend's office above the roar of the city he went, and waited there while his friend went out.

"Keep the key, and keep quiet," he said to his friend upon his return. His friend, with a face seamed with new care, listened and heeded.

On Monday morning the president received a call from his teller.

"Good morning," he said.

"Good morning," replied the teller, then coolly he sat down in a big chair and crossed his legs.

Time was plentiful. The old tired look had left his eyes, and a flame, burning brightly like the flush of a fever on a patient's face, had supplanted it.

"Would you mind calling in the vice presidents?" asked McCall slowly. The big room seemed suddenly filled with memories, pleasing ones, unpleasant ones, and over all there hung a great shadow.

When next he glanced at the president's chair two other men sat behind him—men grim, wondering, and anxious.

McCall slowly rose to his feet. For a fleeting second the weary look came into his eyes—but it was gone as quickly. A thin, white line curved itself slowly about his lips, and the flush of his cheek deepened into a shadowy purple.

"I'm a thief!" he announced solemnly, and the president smiled grimly. "I have taken ten hundred thousand dollars out of your vault—carried it out in a suit-case. In other words, I have committed grand larceny. I have read the law. You can send me to state prison for ten years—no more."

He paused. The three presidents looked at one another—the third smiled just a trifle. Possibly he didn't believe it.

"I have put the money," continued McCall, his voice sunk to a bare whisper, "where you will never find it. I'll serve my term, pay my penalty, and then—then I'll have earned what I have! You'll have to identify each bill as I spend it if you try to recover them when I'm finally free. As you have never seen the money, I don't believe you can recover it."

His hand gripped the edge of the desk, and he met the eyes of the three other men turned upon him curiously.

"Ten hundred thousand dollars!" repeated the president thoughtfully. Then, "Why did you do it?"

McCall hesitated.

"I figured I could never save it in a lifetime. I know I could never earn it—I've tried both ways. This seemed to be the only way."

The president turned to his associates.

"Will you, gentlemen, let me talk to Mr. McCall for a moment?" he questioned.

The other men did not answer. Perhaps they realized that McCall had turned a trick which even their experiences in such matters were unable to fathom or find a remedy for. Here was this man before them, a thief, not an embezzler or a forger or any other kind of a thief, but a plain, every-day thief. They shuddered! Ten years at a salary of one million dollars.

Their money-sensitive souls rebelled at the thought. But, seeing no light, wondering all the while what the president had planned, they assented and left the room, dazed, uncomprehending.

"Sit down, McCall," said the president, "and let's have a talk."

McCall sat down heavily. Somehow he felt more at ease before this one, cool man. His throat was suddenly parched. He felt a longing for something, deep down in his being—a something vague and intangible at first, yet the longing for that something grew with his every breath.

"I'm quite sure," the president began gravely, almost kindly, "that you don't realize how you have tied us up in this matter. So far as I can see now, there's only one way—"

"Then take that way—quick," interrupted McCall. "Let's have it over with. Send me to prison—I'm ready, I'll not whimper."

"That's just the point," began the president. "We can't do that. You see it indicates that we have an awfully lax system here if a clerk can deliberately walk out with so much money. We'll have to find some other way."

He shook his head and glanced sharply at McCall, the teller. McCall's nostrils were dilating slowly, deliberately, trying to catch at that intangible something on the breeze which came through the big, half-opened windows of the room.

"McCall," said the president sharply, "I want you to do something. I want you to do something for me—something for yourself."

Across the desk the banker handed a roll of bills to the man in whose eyes there lay a far-away look.

"Go outdoors! Take a cab and ride—anywhere—I don't care—out in the parks—anywhere. Be back here in an hour!"

Abruptly he left the room.

For a moment the teller glanced at the money in his hands. Then, dazed, he rose and left the building.

It may have been the cleanliness of the new spring air which touched a long-hidden chord in McCall's being. At least, he felt his mind respond to the natural beauty of the city, and his eyes cleared as he drove, cleared until even the fever-flame in his face lost its unnaturalness, and he breathed deep of the spring, of new things, and of cleanliness.

Once as his cab wheeled round a low promontory he saw some little boys sailing toy boats in the park lagoon, and he smiled, faintly at first, and then broadly. He remembered times long ago when he, too, had sailed about on that very pond. It was good to remember.

A long chain of schoolgirls caught his eye, and his heart tightened suddenly, a great fear filling his eyes. He was afraid—and alone. But the air was good and the teller was lost in dreams. The great future was blotted out in delightful memories of the past.

His hour was nearly gone! Involuntarily he glanced at his watch. The cab wheeled down the last boulevard toward the bank, and the teller was a different man, cleansed, mind and body, with the freshness of a spring pounding in his heart.

Suddenly at his left there rose a great gray wall—the armory. Fear gripped at the man's heart again.

Those walls were like the prison walls, and the man, who had wanted them, was now hating them.

The president looked up.

"Well," he asked kindly, "what did you see?"

"Life," answered the teller. "Real life—human life and—spring has come."

"Where did you put the money, McCall?" asked the president carefully.

McCall was still dreaming of the spring. The spirit of it was in his blood and ruling him with a kindly hand.

"Box fifty-five thousand six hundred and sixty-seven of the Mercedes Trust," he answered slowly. "It is in the name of a friend of mine, Hayworth. He has the key. I will give you a note to him."

The president sighed heavily. McCall looked up, steady-eyed and cool of carriage.

"I'm glad," said the president; then he reached under the table and drew out a suit-case. McCall stared at the pile of money it contained. They were big notes, five-hundreds, a few thousands, and many, many hundred-dollar bills.

"You already have them!" he muttered.

"Yes," answered the president. "Half an hour after you left we had recovered them. It wasn't very hard to find a deposit-vault where a suit-case, bearing your initials, had been brought in. We didn't need your friend. The officials of the bank opened your vault for us."

"I'm glad," said the teller. "Now I'm ready."

"Go home!" answered the president. "And play with the wife and girl. You need it—you live too hard—and you need play."

Dazed, the teller turned to the president, and that man, understanding, gripped firmly the hand that was stretched toward him.

"I started wrong," McCall said slowly, and again the president understood.

When he had gone the president turned to his associates.

"It was the spring," he said slowly. "He started wrong and was soiled with life, but the spring purged him. I knew it would.

"He'll make a better watch-dog for our money than we could hire at double what he tried to take."

And the president, his hand running through the heap of greenbacks on the table, smiled as the spring breezes gently bellied out the curtain in his big, elegant room.

The Jumping-off Place

By

Frederick J. Gardenhire

IF you should step into the back-yard some morning, detach the reluctant family cat from the old piece of carpet, place the prickly creature in a bag, and then deposit it sixty or seventy miles away in an unbeaten forest, sooner or later you will be feeding the self-same feline in the same old way. And who can explain the why and wherefore of the animal's return?

Philosophers have tried—and philosophers have failed. It is one of those strange, unaccountable, and unswervable problems in the category of why are Indians beardless, and which point was discovered by Peary, the top or the bottom of the earth.

There was something in the tone of Mr. Raw when he bade good-by that made the elevator-man follow the jaunty figure of the departing bookkeeper with a look of astonishment.

Mr. Raw had been "fired," though the good man might have explained it in altogether a different way; simply that when the oppression had become absolutely unbearable, he had put on his hat and cast aside the fetters that bound him to a tall stool and a dusty book.

If the business should go to ruin, the stockholders could thank a narrow-minded, short-sighted superintendent who saw fit to dispense with the services of the trusty bookkeeper at a critical period.

Why should he, Clarence Raw, former fullback on the college eleven, pick a piece of paper from the floor simply because the demigod of the swivel-chair and ground-glass partition concluded to change a business office into a pink-tea parlor. It was time some one should make a distinct protest, and Mr. Raw had risen to the opportunity.

Mr. Raw stumbled down the stairs of the Subway, made a few terse remarks to the ticket-agent who refused a slick nickel, and it seemed but a natural sequence to strike at the uniformed "pusher" who looked upon the public as galley-slaves.

Turning with his exertions, Mr. Raw's umbrella jabbed the jovial party from Denver in the stomach, and from that moment until the train pulled into the station at Ninety-Sixth Street the car enjoyed a heated argument.

By the time Mr. Raw reached the open air his temperature registered 110 degrees on the level and still rising rapidly.

On entering the flat Mr. Raw found it dark—conveying the obvious tidings that this week wifie would not be the subject of the sewing club's conversation. The prospect in view was a delayed supper and a late arrival at the pinochle game down at Raferty's.

Temperature 174 degrees.

Mr. Raw did what he was accustomed to do in such emergencies. With a determined jaw he walked into the front room, placed his hat and coat in the closet, and sat down to read his paper until his spouse should appear. For several minutes he sat there, and then made his way to the kitchen.

He rolled up his sleeves, lighted two burners on the gas-range, and opened the ice-box door with a savage jerk. The emptiness of the interior told only too plainly the dismal story—Mrs. Raw had not even ordered the things from the grocery.

This last intelligence was the 212 degrees for Clarence Raw.

He shut off the burners with a bang, clanked the stew-pan into the sink, and returned to the library. War was declared.

Several minutes later a key turned in the lock, and Mr. Raw's face grew hard. Mrs. Raw's hands went up to the customary height, her mouth open in exactly the right way to express her astonishment that he should be home, and her gasp of amazement came as natural as life. At the door of the library she stopped to survey him.

"I'm sorry I was late," she said softly. "I'll hurry."

Mr. Raw maintained a disdainful silence.

"It won't happen again," explained his wife, stepping into the room, while she removed her gloves. "We met in Brooklyn this week, and I simply couldn't get away until they served their old crackers and chocolate. I came the minute it was over. I'll have supper in a jiffy."

Mr. Raw moved his head slowly, surveyed her for the space of a full moment with a vacant stare, and went back to his paper.

Mrs. Raw stood watching him; she turned on her heel, and, humming a popular air, went into the bedroom and removed her wraps. Presently the familiar rattle of the tins came as a pleasing sound to Mr. Raw's ears. Then his wife again appeared at the doorway.

"I'm awfully sorry, dear," she said with an ominous sweetness, "but I left in such a hurry. Would you mind stepping over to the store for a loaf of bread and a small Delmonico?"

"Yes, I would mind," answered Mr. Raw heatedly. "I'm sick and tired of this same thing every week. As far as I am concerned, you can throw the supper down the dumb-waiter."

Mrs. Raw did not speak; she faced about; the outside door banged, and a moment later he heard her footsteps on the sidewalk below.

During the evening meal Mr. Raw did his utmost to express his righteous indignation, while his wife held her peace.

Presently Mr. Raw tossed aside his napkin and walked into the front room for his hat and coat. As he anticipated, Mrs. Raw intercepted him at the door.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"Just down to the corner to mail a letter," he answered. "I'll be back in a few minutes."

"Hand over your salary," commanded Mrs. Raw. "I'll not have you give it to those loafers at Raferty's when I've hardly a stitch to wear."

Past experience had shown the futility

of argument, so Mr. Raw pulled the envelope from his pocket and handed it over. Then he turned the knob of the door.

"Wait," ordered his wife, running her fingers through the pile of bills.

"It's all there," said Mr. Raw brazenly.

"That's a lie," said Mrs. Raw. "It's five dollars short."

She handed back the money, and Mr. Raw made a recount.

"Strange," he muttered, searching his pockets.

"Not a bit," answered his wife. "Give me that other five dollars or you stay in."

"I will not," cried Mr. Raw, his indignation rising. "Out of my way, woman, or you'll get hurt."

There was a swish of water, as the contents of the pitcher deluged the figure of Mr. Raw, and a moment later a well-aimed broom descended heavily upon his head.

"Trying to bulldoze your loving wife, are you?" cried the amazon. "A big brute like you ought to be ashamed to intimidate a poor defenseless woman. Do I get the money?"

In desperation Mr. Raw reached into the pocket of his waistcoat, and a moment later she had the crumpled bill, which she carried triumphantly to the dining-room.

On reaching the sidewalk Mr. Raw shook his clenched fist toward the lighted window. Then he put his hands in his pockets and strode defiantly down the street.

This was the usual procedure on pay-nights. But on this particular evening he did not go directly to the saloon — he stopped under the convenient awning of the drug-store to think over the situation.

A tremendous upheaval was going on inside of him—was it the spirit of the early Friesians bursting forth at last to cry out against oppression, or was the heavy black presence of fear wrapping one bony arm about his body at the thought of Monday morning and no job?

For ten—fifteen minutes he stood silent unable to determine what he should do. Once he half turned in the direction of home, but again he hesitated. Finally, pulling his derby low on his forehead, he strode into the corner saloon.

He was not ashamed of his damp appearance; on a pay-night Mrs. Raw relied upon plenty of cold water and a broom. After he received the customary greeting from Sam, the man behind the shining bar, Mr. Raw borrowed ten dollars. Then he stepped out into the street and gazed toward the lighted windows of his apartment.

He was done with it all. He would abandon forever this cruel and relentless city—no more should Columbus Avenue know him—he would hie away to the home of milk, honey, and real butter.

The following morning David Free, on stepping out of the post-office, was surprised to be hailed by his old friend, Clarence Raw.

David Free was the prosperous hardware merchant of Skillmew, New York, and was rated as a first citizen. Skillmew was one of those villages that has no excuse for existing. It claimed one thousand inhabitants, but the census-takers had not disturbed the type in sixty years.

David Free was the same old "Dave" of the college days—he hooked Mr. Raw's arm through his, gave him a good Skillmew cigar, and took him home to a dinner of fried chicken and hot corn-bread.

It might be stated here that David Free had made a paradise for himself in this lovely valley—the cottage was large enough for comfort, but not too large.

To the rear of the house was a garden—a garden which amply supported the table and the neighbors' chickens. A cow munched clover all day on the hillside, and a couple of fine trotters raced about a green pasture lot.

Morning-glories hid the front fence and the air was heavy with the odor of honeysuckles.

And quiet? One might have heard a man snore on the other side of the mountain and the church-bell seemed a desecration.

If ever one possessed a beautiful spot on this green earth, David Free was so endowed, but the first question he asked his old college friend, Clarence Raw, when they were seated in the library that evening, was whether he knew of some one who wanted to buy it.

"Dave," said Mr. Raw, gazing about at the comforts which surrounded them, "just drop that sort of talk. You don't realize when you are well off. You stay right where you are.

"I never in all my life imagined such a spot. No dumb-waiters to whistle; no janitors to tip, and no cave-dwellers above you to shatter your globes and your disposition.

"Why, man, I've been wasting my life up to now. No society drama ever wanders

in between these virgin hills, and you are as safe from imposition as though you lived in a silver vault. Stay here!"

"But that's just it," said David Free. "It's too blame quiet. The theaters used to look pretty good when we were at college. Say, do you remember that little wild-eyed blonde who used to monopolize the spotlight when 'Johnson's Johnny Jolliers' hit town? They called her Dolly—"

"Cut it out!" said Raw. "You're a thousand times better off right where you are. I thought the lecture I gave you at commencement would knock the daylight out of that little Dolly business.

"Take a tip from me—forget her. You have a charming, quiet, industrious, and loving wife. That other girl is probably dead by now, or leading some chap to the oat-bin. Wild? Say, she—"

"Easy now, Clarence," remonstrated David Free, holding up his hand. "This isn't an *addendum* to that self-same bunch of commencement oratory. The reason I brought up the subject was that the lady you observed sitting opposite me at the table, who saw that your plate was never free of fried chicken, was the self-same little Dolly, and—"

Mr. Raw's face was a study.

"Honest?" he gasped.

"Honest? Of course it's honest. But we'll change the subject. Whatever happened to that little grape-arbor brunette called Elsie you had up to the last hop?

"Sugar wouldn't have melted in her mouth; all she could do was smile. I suppose some great big overbearing hyena is leading her a merry chase. Such is life. She was just daffy about you, and—"

But this time Mr. Raw quickly changed the subject.

At ten-thirty David Free yawned and suggested that they go to bed.

Mr. Raw was not sleepy, but he acquiesced and followed his host up the wide stairs. The chamber into which they entered was larger than the entire Raw apartment, including the public hall.

The New Yorker had never conceived a bedroom where it was possible to make the perilous journey from the door to the bureau without barking one's shins on the bedpost, but here there was plenty additional space for a table and two rocking-chairs.

David Free placed the light on the table, wished his friend a pleasant night, and withdrew.

Mr. Raw gazed about with deep satisfaction. He undressed quickly, blew out the lamp and climbed between the covers.

Quiet? Did I say it was quiet? The moment the light disappeared some sort of a squeaking insect deep in the recesses of the fireplace sounded the scale in every key known to the insect kingdom.

From the first *tremolo* the volume of sound increased until it filled the entire room and Mr. Raw would have sworn it could have drowned out the elevated.

Then a dog way off among the hills had a bad case of indigestion, or the pip, and expressed its melancholy in a sad quaver of a high falsetto, while the old house cracked and squeaked under the tread of unseen spooks.

Mr. Raw heard the clock toll several different times, and, despairing of slumber, lighted the lamp and dived behind the Japanese fan of the fireplace, determined upon a speedy and dire revenge.

And it is needless to say he did not find the insect songster. But sleep was now out of the question, and his watch showed three o'clock.

He wandered up and down the room, looking for some amusement, but never a book, magazine, or newspaper could he find. He was half-inclined to venture downstairs to the library, but David Free was a crack shot and the burglar scare had been a topic of conversation at the evening meal.

Mr. Raw searched through his pockets without result, and finally opened a drawer of the dresser. Shades of Balboa, it was there! To be sure it was only a couple of sheets of the Skillmew *Blade*, six months old, but he read and relished every line.

How slowly the time passed. He digested and memorized the personals, the editorials, and the "Topics" while he searched in vain for another scrap.

A pale pink had appeared in the eastern sky when Mr. Raw blew out the lamp, and from sheer exhaustion fell asleep.

Ten minutes later David Free knocked on the door, and it was a worn-out individual who sat down to biscuits and coffee.

That day Mr. Raw merely existed. He wandered about the little town, rode through the streets and adjoining hills behind the two trotters, and played croquet until the mosquitoes drove him indoors. When he said good night and blew out the lamp he prayed for a better rest than on the previous evening.

But it was of no use. The cricket had brought a friend and the dog suffered a relapse.

Mr. Raw endured the racket until two o'clock, and then, throwing aside the covers, climbed into his clothes.

Braving a possible gunshot, he slipped down the stairs and tiptoed across the front-porch.

The town was still and dark.

A freight wheezed its way along the bank of the Hudson below Riverside Drive.

It clanked, rumbled and shook, but the face of the sleeper in the empty box-car bore a smile of calm enjoyment. The train paused for a moment, the man's eyes opened, then he crawled to the door and looked out.

Then he shook himself, slipped to the roadway, and a moment later was climbing the hill to the Drive.

Shortly after, Mrs. Raw heard a key fumbling in the lock of the hall door.

She crept to the dining-room and stood in the darkness.

"I'm sorry—" began a low voice.

There was a swish of water, a deluge, and a broom rained blow after blow.

A man fled to the front room and crouched in the window, a smile of contentment on his face and happiness in his heart.

He was home.

The Other Fellow's Game

By *Frank X. Finnegan*

BEING a guide in the North woods, "Hobe" Williams might not be expected to have a keen insight into the devious ways of the metropolis. He had, however, been to town on a few occasions, and always escaped back to the woods with as much clothing as he took away with him, and nearly as much money.

That this is a difficult feat will be admitted by many who visit the big city only occasionally, and by more who live in the smoke-belt.

Hobe, however, took no especial credit to himself for having "put it over." He was of the opinion that the man who gets stung in town or country has himself to blame for not having harkened to the buzzing of the bee.

"It's funny the notions some of these here city fellers get. I been guidin' up here about eighteen years now, mostly city fellers, of course, and I just sort o' study 'em, year after year—lawyers and business men, and one thing and another.

"From the way they talk, it looks like there isn't one of 'em wouldn't scuttle a ship for a ten-dollar note, if he was pretty sure he wouldn't get nailed by the sheriff—and some of 'em would take a chance on slippin' the sheriff half of the ten-spot and gettin' away with it. That's one side of 'em.

"Another is they can't understand how anybody is willin' to live up here in the woods and work for a livin' the way we do, when he could go down to the city and starve to death comfortable enough. And they don't mind lettin' you know that they think we're the easiest marks on earth, bar none.

"A couple o' years ago I guided a feller up in these waters that was makin' his first trip to the woods. That wasn't nothin' against him — everybody that's unlucky enough to be raised in the city has to make his first trip, if he wants bass fishin', but this feller Harlow was so blamed green that I used to go round behind the shack and have a laugh where he couldn't see me.

"When he did catch a fish by mistake, he was afraid to take it off the hook, and he thought every owl he heard hootin' at night was a timber wolf scratchin' on the door of the shack. He had lots of money, just the same, and he used to string me about how he'd be ridin' round the city in his ottyomobil in a few weeks while I was still rowin' a boat and fryin' bacon for myself.

"Finally he says one evenin' when we were sittin' here same as me and you are now: 'Hobe,' he says, 'what do you do with yourself in the winter? I should think these woods would be pretty dumb bleak with four feet o' snow in 'em and all the rivers and lakes froze over.'

"'Well,' I says, 'I just about make the best of it. I lay in plenty of fire-wood in the fall, and when winter comes I do a little fishin' through a hole in the ice, I go out and get a deer once in a while for fresh meat, and I do quite a bit of trappin' after the snow comes.'

"'Trappin'?' he says. 'What do you get up here?'

"'Oh, some mink and beaver,' I says, sort o' carelesslike, 'and a good many otter, but mostly skunks and that sort of varmints. But I don't put in so much time at it lately,' I says, 'because we've been gettin' such rotten prices for the skins.'

"Harlow didn't appear to be an awful lot interested, but I was watchin' him out of the corner of my eye while I loaded my pipe, and I could see he was thinkin' a heap.

"After a while he says: 'Why, what do you get for that sort of pelts, if it isn't pryin' into your business too much? I'm sort o' curious about things like that, you know.'

"'Oh, no,' I says, 'it ain't pryin' at all. I don't mind tellin' you that I usu'lly get about thirty cents apiece for mink and somethin' like a quarter for skunks, and maybe sixty or seventy-five cents for otter and beaver. You can see it don't pay much, especially when the animals is gettin' so scarce, and it takes a lot of watchin' and plannin' to trap half a dozen good-sized ones.'

"I could see him sort o' prick up his ears at that, but he was a smooth article—just the kind that gets along down in the city and rides in ottyomobils—and he never batted an eye to let me see whether he thought I was gettin' the worst of it or not. After a while he says:

"'Why, it don't seem to me like those was such awful poor prices for skins that don't cost you anything but a little time and work when you ain't got nothin' else to do. But, of course, I don't know anything about it,' he says, like he was afraid I might get a hunch he was in the fur business.

"Finally he says: 'Say, Hobe, I been thinkin' about that fur business since you spoke of it.'

"'Yes?' I says, never lookin' up from the reel.

"'Yes,' he says, 'what I mean is that I might buy some skins from you myself at a higher figure, if I could see my way clear to makin' a little spec' on it, you understand? That's business, Hobe,' he says.

"'Yes, that's business,' I says. 'And I'm your man, if you can pay me my figure for skins. I think the price ought to stiffen up a little this comin' winter,' I says, 'cause minks and otter and even skunks have been gettin' scarcer every year.'

"I thought first that Harlow might 'a' been in the fur business himself, and I drew him out by talkin' about animals and furs and one thing and another until I see he either didn't know the first thing about skins or else he was a grand liar, and I took a chance on the first proposition.

"The upshot of it was he gives me his address in the city and tells me he'll write me along about the middle of January, if

there is anything doin' with him in the fur business.

"I got busy early in the season with about three times as many traps as I ever set out before, makin' ready for my friend Harlow, and I was the regular little busy Jimmy of this neck of the woods for a few months, curin' skins and stowin' 'em away for a risin' market.

"Sure enough, along comes Harlow's letter about the time I was expectin' to make my trip to town, tellin' me to come ahead and bring down anything I had, as he could promise me a shade better prices than them I had been speakin' of, and askin' me not to say anything to anybody, and especially not to whoever I used to deal with before.

"I figured from that he was fixin' to cover up his trail and lie out of the fur business if anything ever come up about it after our little deal, and I began to get some suspicious of Brother Harlow.

"But I packed up a big trunkful of skins and hiked down to the city to hunt for him.

"Soon as I came out of the deepo a young feller with a peaked cap and a big number on his coat, steps up and says:

"'Taxi, mister? Take you any place in town.' I didn't quite get him first off, so I says: 'What's the idea, bub? Have you got a hack line?'

"'Here you are,' he says, walkin' up to a shiny carriage, and I knew in a minute it was one of them ottyomobils—I'd seen pictures of 'em, but I never saw a regular one before.

"Now, thinks I, here's a chance to show Harlow he ain't doin' business with any piker—I'll just ride up to his office in this thing, the same as he's always talkin' about. I took out his card and showed it to the young chap.

"'How much to take me up there?' I says.

"'Two dollars,' he says, but he said it so quick I knew he was tryin' to hold me up. He would 'a' figured some if it was the right price. He began to crowd me into the hack by the elbow, but I sort of straightened out my arm and stopped him quite sudden.

"'Hold on,' I says, 'I've got a trunk here. How much to take me and the trunk?'

"'Oh, it'll be a dollar more for the trunk,' he says without battin' an eye.

"It's no wonder he could afford to buy one of them machines if he got many suckers to pay him that kind of prices, but I wasn't goin' to be bluffed out of dashin' up to Harlow's in style for the sake of a dollar or so, and I made a bargain with the chap.

"'That's too much,' I says, 'but I'll give you a dollar and a half to take me and the trunk up to this-here place. If that ain't a go, I can walk up there and carry the trunk, and spend the money for grub the rest of the week.'

"'All right,' he says, 'you're on. Where's the trunk-check?'

"We went into the baggage-room, and the fellow that fished my trunk out of the pile wanted a dime for doin' it, and didn't get it, and another fellow wanted to carry it out to the ottyomobil, but I wrastled it out of his hands and carried it myself—I never made money easier in my life than I did right there in that deepo.

"I climbed into the taxi-thing—that's what he kept callin' it—after he'd stowed that parcel of skins up beside him, and away we went through the streets like a fool log goin' down stream on a spring freshet. I expected a jam every time we turned a corner, but we missed all the rest of 'em somehow, and in about five minutes he pulls up in front of one of them big buildin's about a mile high.

"I sort of expected Harlow might be in front of the place or in the window or somethin' to see me arrive, but there was nothin' doin' on that, and I had to pony up my one-fifty and make the best of it.

"I put the trunk on my shoulder and walked in, lookin' for the stairs, but before I went two feet a guy with a letter-carrier's uniform came out of a cell and says:

"'Here! Round to the back with that baggage! Where do you think you're goin'?'

"'If you don't get out of my way,' I says, 'I'll drop this on your foot. I've got a date with Mr. Harlow, the man you're workin' for, and this here trunk is goin' right up to his office before I let go of it.'

"'All right,' he says, 'Harlow is on the twelfth floor. Right up them stairs.'

"He points out the marble stairs, and I started up with the load of skins. Say, if Harlow has to make that climb every day it's no wonder he's a bunch of skin and bone and has to go up in the woods every year to get a rest.

"When I was up about four flights that trunk got as heavy as an elephant, and by

the time I got her up to the eighth I was breathin' some, and had to set down on her every little while to think it over. But I made it, all right, and finally I come to an office door marked 'James Harlow, Broker,' and in I walks with my wagon-load on my shoulder.

"He was tickled to death to see me, and I thought he never would stop shaking my hand. When I opened up the trunk and took out the skins and began pilin' them on his desk and round on the floor he nearly had a fit.

"'Which are the mink?' he says, and when I pointed out a pile of skins near his ink-well, he picked 'em up and began rubbin' his face with 'em like a woman.

"'Ain't they beauties?' he says. 'By George, Williams,' he says, 'I don't see how you ever managed to do it! They tell me mink is gettin' to be as scarce as hen's teeth.'

"'That's right,' I says, never battin' an eye, 'and that's why the price has gone up a little this winter. Now let's get down to business,' I says; 'what are you ready to pay for these here skins?'

"He went to his desk and got out a little list he had made out, and then I was sure he'd been figurin' some on makin' a nice little spec' in the fur business—prob'ly had found out just what the skins was worth and was wonderin' how hard he could jolt me on the price.

"'Let's see,' he says, 'we've got mink, otter, beaver, and skunk.'

"'Oh, I forgot to show you,' I says. 'I got one silver-fox, too.'

"'A silver-fox?' he says, jumpin' in the air. 'Which is it?'

"'This one,' I says, haulin' out a skin from the bottom of the trunk. 'I ain't seen one before in ten years.'

"Well, sir, I could see his eyes begin to dance, though he was tryin' hard not to let on anything to me, and he took a rubber at his list of prices again.

"'I didn't find the prices were any higher this year,' he says, 'but I guess we can come to a trade, all right. Suppose we say fifty cents apiece for the mink, sixty for the beavers and otter, and—well, say five dollars for the silver-fox. How does that strike you?'

"'You're forgettin' the skunks,' I says. 'I understand they're usin' them very heavy for trimmin' seal coats this year.'

"'Oh, yes,' he says. 'We'll count in the skunks the same price as the mink, then; that is, fifty cents apiece. That would bring you a nice little bundle of money, Hobe,' he says. 'You've got a lot of skins here."

"I pretended to stop and think it over a heap, and then I says: 'Yes, it would bring me in a good bunch, Mr. Harlow, but it would bring you in a whole lot more on account of you dealin' with your friend. I couldn't think of lettin' go of these skins at them prices,' I says, 'especially such a year as this has been. Suppose we say just twice what you mentioned all along the line.'

"He gasped a minute, but he was game and he didn't want to lose them skins—I could see that. So he says, all of a sudden: 'All right—it's a good stiff price,' he says, 'but we'll call it a bargain at your figure. Just count out the different sorts, Hobe, and I'll make a list of 'em and give you a check.'

"'Nothin' doin' on the check,' I says. 'I'm goin' back to the woods on the night train, and some of these bankers in town mightn't know me to speak to. I'll have to have the cash,' I says, 'and a bill of sale to make everything reg'lar.'

"Well, he counted the skins with me and made out a bill of sale, and then he had to go out and get a check cashed to bring me the coin, and we was through—two hundred and fifty-seven dollars it come to, and I figured in my own mind Harlow ought to get a couple of thousand dollars for them skins."

Hobe stopped to heave a few more logs on the fire, and I waited in silence.

"That is," he went on, when he had dropped heavily into his seat again, "he ought to have got that, only it was a bad year for mink that winter, and all them minks was weasels, that we get eight or ten cents for, and them beavers was mostly muskrats, that bring about fifteen cents in a good season.

"I did want to bring him a silver-fox, but the best I could do was a timber-wolf that I collected the bounty on from the State, and I had to fill in them skunks with ground-squirrels.

"But then, Harlow never knowed the difference — until afterward. And I ain't been guidin' in them woods since.

"Pretty country, too," he added with a sigh, and returned to a solemn contemplation of the fire.

The Mystery of the Peplona Man

By Elbert D. Wiggin

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

PETTIBONE, an artist, whose father has been hounded to death by a rascal named Max Eaglestone, swears vengeance and starts in pursuit. In attempting to waylay the man in the Subway, he meets with an accident and is taken to a hospital. In the cot next to his is a man named Talbot, who has been injured and disfigured and is having his face built up again, and who raves about the years the doctors have stolen from him, because he is unable to remember further back than six years. To amuse him, Pettibone draws pictures, and one day makes the likeness of Max Eaglestone, whereupon Talbot cries out that name, then his memory fails him again. The Subway people provide Pettibone with a possible clue—the word "Kingston"—on a scrap of paper, and Pettibone starts hunting in all the Kingstons. In one of them he meets his friend Talbot, selling an Indian remedy, Peplona. They form a partnership and are so successful that they decide to move to Stony Island and open an amusement place, to be known as Peplona Park. In arranging to buy a hotel in connection with this park they have dealings with a Mr. Gray, whose daughter Talbot and Pettibone have saved from drowning. Mr. Gray, who believes Talbot to be a crook, who has at one time done him out of money, does not disclose this fact, but finally tells Pettibone what he knows about Talbot, and that his real name is Max Eaglestone.

CHAPTER XIII.

ASSURANCE MADE SURE.

ALL that night Pettibone wandered like a man distraught.

He could not go home and meet Talbot. The thought of listening to the other's friendly banter, or of discussing with him the prospects of their scheme, was, under the circumstances, not to be considered.

Yet he could not act without further proof. He must know certainly, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that Harrison Gray's assertion was correct.

It could not be, he told himself with passionate insistence. His kindly, generous, warm-hearted partner, the cold, scheming villain who had deliberately robbed and betrayed every one whom he could induce to trust him? It was incredible, absurd upon the face of it.

Yet there were certain facts which stood out, incapable of being controverted.

In the first place, there was Harrison Gray's positive identification. In order to

* This story began in The Cavalier for March.

assure himself on that point, Pettibone stole to the deserted studio, and dragged out the portrait of Talbot from behind a pile of canvases.

Eagerly he scanned the pictured lineaments by the light of a candle. Yes, now that it had been indicated to him, he could see the resemblance for himself. It did not lie in features, nor in facial contour; they had been changed by the work of the doctors; but rested in the expression, and was hence more noticeable in the picture than in the living subject.

How blind he had been, that he had never observed it before! How dull of comprehension, that he had never taken account of the coincidences which seemed so patent to him now!

It was the very day on which he himself had been injured that Talbot was brought into the hospital. The accident which had befallen the latter was while he was attempting to cross Park Row.

Was it not reasonable to suppose, then, that it was Talbot's face he had seen at the window as the two Subway trains passed each other at Bleecker Street, and that it was Talbot who had dropped his pocketbook at the feet of the old ticket-chopper, having never returned for it because the recollection that he had even had a pocketbook was blotted from his mind?

The place and the time of Talbot's accident certainly pointed to such a conclusion, while his hazy familiarity with the interior of the old Hotel Kingston at Stony Island almost clinched it.

True, the "S" shaped scar which had been such a distinguishing mark upon Eaglestone's countenance was missing. Pettibone grasped eagerly at this exculpating circumstance as it occurred to him; and then relapsed again into despondency, for he remembered that the doctors had told him, at the time of the operation, that all that side of Talbot's forehead had been grafted over with new skin, which, of course, had obliterated the scar.

Leaving the studio, he went out again into the night, and tramped about for hours, considering the matter in all its complicated phases, trying vainly to gain some additional light.

In the course of his wanderings, the recollection returned to him of the astonishment shown at the change in Talbot's appearance by the bartender at that little hotel in the town of Kingston, where he and the medicine-man had run into one another nearly a year before.

There was an individual, it flashed upon him, who could give him definite information; somebody who had known Talbot in both his old and new guises.

His mind was made up on the instant. He would go back at once.

Returning to the studio, he indicted a brief note to his partner, announcing that he had been called West on urgent private business. Then, going up to New York, he took the first train out for the little city which had seen the darkest and most desperate days of his life, and also the inception of his new career.

Utterly exhausted by his two nights' vigil, he had his berth made up at once, and tumbling into it, slept heavily and uninterruptedly through to his destination.

Leaving the car in the fresh brightness of the spring morning, he felt immeasurably refreshed, and in order to stretch his legs and clear his brain, decided to walk up from the station.

How familiar it all was.

Here was a spot, he remembered, where once, in a late-at-night reverie when his affairs looked darkest, he had paused, and had almost decided to end the game once and for all by suicide.

Here, too, was the corner where he and Talbot had held forth to the crowds on that first night that Art and Peplona had joined hands. Over there, in front of the hotel, he could almost see Talbot once more, as the vender had stood there in his gorgeous panoply and extended his offer of a partnership.

Everything served to remind the artist of the desperate, friendless strait in which he himself had been prior to Talbot's arrival, and of the changes which had come into his life through his association with the big-hearted, generous faker.

Now this friend of friends, this more than brother, had suddenly been transformed into a loathed and detested enemy, the man he had sworn to slay as soon as his eyes should rest upon him.

Pettibone groaned at the perverse cruelty of fate. He wondered if ever before a mortal man had been placed in so anomalous a predicament.

Nevertheless, he had no time now to bemoan his hapless situation. Since he had entered upon this investigation, he must carry it through as speedily as possible, and

regardless of results. He was no longer willing to abide in uncertainty.

When he came to interview the bartender, who fortunately happened to be on trick, he was soon able to gather a wealth of information.

"Sam Talbot? Oh, yes; I've known Sam Talbot ever since I was a kid," the man assured him, "although at that, I'm free to tell you, I'd never have recognized him the last time he came round, if he hadn't told me who he was. Funny thing, the way that map of his had changed. Of course, a full beard makes any man look different; but there was more than that to Talbot. Why, his nose had even switched from being a hook to a snub.

"Lots of folks asked him the reason for the transformation; but the question always made him kind o' huffy, and he wouldn't give none of 'em no satisfaction."

While the other was running on, Pettibone had drawn an envelope from his inside coat-pocket, and with his pencil rapidly sketched on the back of it a representation of Eaglestone's sharply-cut, malignant features.

"Do you think that looks anything like him in the old days?" he asked, presenting the finished portrait to the gaze of the bartender.

The latter gave an exclamation of surprise.

"The very moral of him," he cried. "Except," examining the sketch more critically, "you've made him look a little fiercer than what Sam did. Still," emphatically, "it's him, all right. Why, you've even got the scar on his temple."

"That 'S' shaped scar, eh?" observed Pettibone.

"Ye-es," doubtfully; "thought I would call it more of a half-moon, or horseshoe shape. You see," continued the bartender, "it was where he got kicked in the head that time he had the runaway down Three-Mile Hill."

"Was that occurrence round here?" questioned the artist excitedly.

"Sure it was. And a terrible affair it was, too. One of the horses kicked Sam with a front hoof while he was trying to get the team up, and when Bill Saunders found him lying there in the road, he was like a dead man—clean knocked out, and taken the count.

"Doc Fenner pulled him through, all right; but Sam was never the same after that. He got to be sort of mean and sulky; and nobody shed any tears over it when he finally sold out the Peplona business, and went off down East.

"From that time on, we lost track of him, though I did hear once that he was living in New York. But nobody here knew anything for certain, until he turned up again last year at the time you met him."

Pettibone wondered a little that in a gossiping community like Kingston he had never heard any of this before, until he recalled that he had had very little to do with any of the citizens there until after his association with Talbot, and then knowing the latter's prejudice against any discussion of the matter, they had naturally also kept silence in front of him.

He spent the remainder of the morning in verifying the bartender's story, and having confirmed it in every detail from a multiplicity of sources, took the return train that afternoon for New York.

There could no longer be a possibility for doubt in the most skeptical mind.

Samuel J. Talbot and Max Eaglestone were one and the same person.

The vital question with Pettibone now was, what was he going to do about it?

CHAPTER XIV.

DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE.

ONE more bit of corroborative testimony Pettibone felt that he ought to have; and for this he sought the doctor who had performed the operation on Talbot at the hospital.

The physician in response to his request very obligingly hunted up his notes, and read to him what he had jotted down at the time in relation to the case; but unfortunately this failed to cover the points on which the artist desired explicit information.

Still, the operator's memory, the case having been a notable one, was able practically to fill in the gaps.

Yes, now that Mr. Pettibone happened to mention it, he did recall that there had been a peculiarly shaped scar on the patient's temple.

Was it the right side? He himself had been rather under the impression that it was on the left; but probably he was mistaken.

At any rate, the flesh had been so torn and macerated about both temples that it had been necessary to resort to skin-grafting in either place, and, therefore, wherever the scar had been, it had disappeared.

The shape of it? Well, that would be a little hard to state. Yes, one might call it "S" shaped, he supposed, though really he recollected it more as a crescent. Perhaps the lower part of the "S" had been torn away in the accident. In any event, it was very difficult to say from memory, especially where so long a time had elapsed since the operation, and in a case where there had been so much to engage the attention of the operator.

Not very definite intelligence, it is true; but Pettibone felt that he did not need exact confirmation on this point. The burden of proof was too overwhelming in other directions to be affected one way or another by a little uncertainty here.

Talbot was Eaglestone. There was no doubt of that. He had to face that fact squarely. There could be no longer any faltering, nor hesitation. He must act, and act at once.

And though he did not just then realize it himself, he had already made up his mind. Those long hours of self-questioning and anguished reflection had not the least whit affected the inevitableness of his decision.

It was simply impossible for him now to think of carrying out his long cherished design. He could no more lift his hand to kill Talbot than he could to injure Marian Gray.

He might scourge himself all he had a mind to as a weakling and a coward, might lash himself into a fury by recounting and dilating upon his wrongs; but he could not bring himself to the point where it was possible even to consider an act of injury to his partner.

No, there was nothing left for him to do but to go away.

He would make no explanations to Talbot—he did not believe he could endure the ordeal of a personal interview, and it was equally beyond him to write what was in his heart — but would simply slip off somewhere and begin life anew under different circumstances.

With this plan in mind, he waited until he was sure that Talbot would be over at the island on the site of their enterprise, and then took an elevated train for the suburb where they lived, intending to gather together his belongings, and then quietly disappear.

But the first person he met as he stepped off the train at the little station was Marian Gray.

"Oh, Mr. Pettibone," she cried, extending a hand to him in welcome, "we are all rejoiced to see you back again. Mr. Talbot has been simply wild for fear your absence might delay the all-important opening of Peplona Park. You must never run off in this way again without giving any notice of your intentions."

"I am afraid, Miss Gray," he said gravely, "that Peplona Park will have to open without me, whether or no. I must leave again immediately, and this time it is for good."

"What?" she exclaimed in amazement. "Leaving us for good? Why, what do you mean? What has happened? You must give me the details."

And then, because his heart was full to bursting, and the parting, now that it had come, was a so much more bitter wrench than he had even anticipated, he told her the whole pitiful story.

She listened in silence, but with evident sympathy, until he had finished.

"And you think this discovery makes it imperative that you should leave?" she asked, with something of her father's quick, businesslike manner.

"Why, what else can I do?" he questioned. "You surely do not expect me to work on in friendly terms with a man who has proved himself such an absolute villain?"

"No, of course not. But," meditatively, "is this the same man?"

"Oh, the proof is incontrovertible," interrupted Pettibone. "I would not let myself believe, until I had removed the last vestige of doubt."

"The same man, so far as physical characteristics go, certainly," she granted impatiently. "But what I mean, is he the same man in the part that counts, the heart and mind? Is it not rather the truth that Max Eaglestone was born at the moment when the runaway accident disturbed and disarranged Samuel Talbot's mental processes, and that he died in that second injury down on Park Row?"

"You mean then, that Talbot is a sort of *Dr. Jekyll* and *Mr. Hyde?*" exclaimed Pettibone.

"Well, partly that; or, as I should prefer to put it, that for a season an alien and entirely different personality dwelt in Talbot's brain, being only dislodged by the shock of that second accident, when it fled, never to return again.

"You may call it a case of obsession, of temporary insanity, what you will, but one fact seems clear to me, and that is that the man against whom you swore your vow of vengeance has passed beyond your reach. Toward the Samuel Talbot who now exists, you can have no reason for hatred, or indeed for anything but the warmest and friendliest sentiments. You must put aside your thoughts of vengeance."

Like a flood of light the girl's clear and logical presentment of the case displayed to Pettibone the folly of the step he had been about to take. A great wave of relief swept over his soul, and carried away forever the burden he had borne so long.

"You are right, Miss Gray," he assented enthusiastically, as he caught her hand in a clasp of ecstatic fervor. "I am indeed absolved from my vow. I do not have to give up my friend. I am a free man at last, and the future is mine, to do with as I will."

He left her then, and repairing direct to the studio, jumped with a will into the work he had laid aside in such sore travail of spirit four days before. The world seemed bright once more.

There Talbot found him a little later, and after giving him an exuberant welcome, began to betray a natural curiosity as to the reason for the other's abrupt and inexplicable departure.

"What's getting into you, Pettibone," he cried half jestingly, half in earnest, "kiting off in this way without so much as a word to anybody? Come, sir; give an account of yourself, or I'll begin to believe it was some girl you went chasing off to see."

But Pettibone stopped his banter with a quick gesture of the hand. "Don't ask me, Sam," he said. "It was something I thought I had to attend to; but it was a painful and distressing bit of business, and I never want to think of it again. The thing to do now is to put on full steam and to give all our time and all our energy to completing Peplona Park."

"That's the talk," agreed Talbot, with a hearty slap on his partner's shoulder. "And with us two down to business, and pulling together as we can, there need never be any fear but what we'll win!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE WORK OF THE LIGHTNING.

SO, with complete harmony established, and both partners giving to the project the very best that was in them, Peplona Park rapidly approached completion, and its opening was advertised on enormous posters through all the environs of the greater metropolis.

May came on, and Stony Island, hibernating sluggishly through all the winter months, commenced to show faint signs of awakening activity.

The old board shacks along the Bowery, known fallaciously as "amusement palaces," and which had seen service for well-nigh a generation, were freshened up with a new coat of paint, and the grind-organs in the merry-go-rounds were accorded a tune not more than three years old. But to all intents and purposes there was no change.

The place was apparently to remain the old Stony Island with its frankfurters, its candy men, its dance-halls, and its rioting.

Few people paid any attention to the work in progress away up on Surf Avenue, or, if they did, and chanced to inquire what was going on behind the high board fence which screened all preparations from the public gaze, they were informed that it was only a couple of crazy interlopers who were bound to get a "horrible jolt," whenever they should venture to open up.

"Why, they say they are going to run a clean resort," these critics would cackle. "Think of that, will you? A clean resort at Stony Island!"

Talbot and Pettibone, however, did not allow themselves to be disturbed by these sneering prophecies. They well knew what they were about, and they had infinite confidence in the innate cleanness of the average American citizen.

"We can get along without the 'rough-house' crowd," Talbot succinctly put it. "There's more of the other kind, anyway."

They also decided to let all the other places on the island open first, their determination being not to admit the public, nor even to grant it a view of Peplona Park, until everything was in readiness.

"We must hit 'em between the eyes

first pop, my boy," counseled Talbot, when this subject came up for discussion between them. "We can't afford to make no early mistakes, countin' on rectifying things later. We've got to be right to start with.

"Now, as I understand it," he went on, "there ain't nothin' but a little scatterin' of people comes down here all through May. The first big jam is on Decoration Day. Therefore, I would advise holdin' off to then, and openin' up our gates to surgin' multitudes, rather than to a beggarly corporal's guard."

Pettibone coincided with this opinion, and accordingly May 30 was decided on as the *première* for which the two were laboring so indefatigably to get ready. It was their ambition to have the last board in place, the last stroke of paint dry, before a single ticket was handed in at the turnstiles.

And they succeeded.

At sunset on May 29, when the men gathered up their coats and dinner-pails, everything was in readiness.

Peplona Park was a finished creation.

Talbot and Pettibone, tired but jubilant, boarded a trolley-car and started for their lodgings. It had been an exceedingly warm day—one of those oppressive warm days which sometimes come in spring, although they seem filched from the very heart of summer.

Talbot swabbed his perspiring brow, and threw back his coat to the cool breeze sweeping up from the salt marshes over which they were passing.

"Give us a day like this to-morrow, Bob," he panted joyfully, "and Stony Island won't be able to hold all the people that'll come down there."

"I don't know," returned his partner apprehensively. "I don't altogether like the looks of that sky."

He pointed to where the sun was sinking in the West, into a bank of jagged, threatening-looking clouds.

"Oh, that'll be all right," averred his companion, not however without some evident qualms of doubt. "Them is just heat-clouds. They'll all be gone by to-morrow morning."

They tried thenceforth to hearten each other up with favorable weather predictions; but the anxious glances they continually cast at the darkening horizon only too plainly belied their brave words. It was easy to be seen that both of them were "whistling while going through a graveyard."

Arriving at their lodging place, they found another unpleasant surprise in store for them; for awaiting them was an emissary from the electric light company, who curtly informed them that unfavorable reports concerning their solvency had reached the ears of the corporation, and that therefore a deposit would be required of them before the lights could be turned on in the park.

Now, the electrical display which they had planned was one of the great features of their undertaking, and the one upon which they had counted more than any other to draw the throngs to their gates.

If the electric company persisted in its demand, irretrievable ruin stared them in the face.

How to meet such an emergency? They were flat broke down to sixty-seven cents between them; they had raised every cent it was possible for them to borrow. Did this insolent demand mean that now, in the very moment of victory, they were to be forced to taste the bitterness of defeat?

Pettibone turned a look of blank dismay toward his partner. Then, however, were the Napoleonic qualities of that wonderful man exemplified as never before. He turned to the haughty emissary of a great monopoly with the air of an emperor addressing his most abject slave.

"Go back to them that sent you," he said sternly, "and tell them that the proprietors of Peplona Park ain't in the habit of payin' for goods before they get 'em—whether it's calico, or whether it's the brilliant illuminant that flashes forth from their rollin' dynamos.

"Still, since they've got so tarnation smart, you may tell them that we shall proceed at once to install our own lightin' apparatus within the next month; and in the meantime havin' to use their service, we shall pay them at six o'clock to-morrow night, before a single lamp is turned on, not a deposit as desired, but the full bill for the entire thirty days."

"Good Heavens, Sam!" ejaculated Pettibone, after the agent of the company had gone. "How did you ever have the nerve to spring such a whopper as that on him?"

"That ain't no whopper," returned Talbot calmly. "I mean just what I say. With the receipts from the morning and afternoon, I'll go there to-morrow evening

and square up for the first night, pretending that I want to pay for the whole month. When he sees that I've got money, though, he'll begin to think that we really do intend to put in our own lightin' plant, and he'll weaken like a dog. I shouldn't wonder if I can't make him reduce our bill by as much as twenty or thirty per cent before I get through with him.

"I only wish I felt as easy in my mind," he went on with a sigh, "over them clouds apilin' up yonder in the West. They certainly do look like we was in for a spell of weather."

Nor were his apprehensions destined to be unfulfilled. Darker and darker grew the sky, nearer and more frequent came the flashes of lightning and the long roll of the thunder.

About ten o'clock a veritable tempest broke with furious blasts of raging wind, a perfect deluge of rain, and an almost unintermittent display of electricity.

It was like one of those tropical tornadoes of which we hear, a pandemonium of warring elements, a tumultuous orgy of wind, and rain, and hail, and bursting thunder-claps.

At the very height of it, Pettibone, standing by the window, and gazing out over the storm-lashed bay, was suddenly dazzled by a wave of flaming radiance, almost deafened by a resounding peal of thunder, and found himself stricken to the floor, numb and dazed.

Even so, however, the experience was so exactly similar to the results of his contact with the third rail that morning in the Subway that he knew immediately what had happened.

"The house is struck!" he exclaimed, staggering to his feet, and turning to see if Talbot had escaped as easily as himself.

Just over the spot where the medicine-man had been sitting was a huge, irregular hole in the ceiling, and in the wall beside the water-pipe was another aperture, showing where the bolt had entered and emerged.

Had it smitten Talbot in its course? Pettibone scarcely dared doubt it; for, directly in the path the erratic current had chosen, lay his partner a crumpled heap upon the floor.

Rushing over to him, the artist threw himself down beside the huddled form, and laid an ear to Talbot's chest.

Ah! Thank God! He was still alive; his heart was beating!

By this time the other occupants of the house, frightened and panic-stricken, had invaded the room, and Pettibone hastily despatched one of them for a doctor.

Fortunately, the house had not been set on fire by the impact of the lightning, and there was no necessity to move the injured man other than to lay him on the bed.

Then ensued an anxious time for Pettibone. He hung over his partner with the solicitude of a mother for her first-born, calling on him, trying to rouse him to consciousness, alternating between hope and fear at every breath the other drew.

But presently the physician came, and then he discovered, a little to his shame, that all his alarms had been groundless.

"Pooh," declared the doctor after a hurried examination, "he isn't hurt a mite. Just stunned and knocked out a bit, as it were; but he'll be around as chipper as ever in less than half an hour."

As if to prove the statement, Talbot at that very minute began to exhibit signs of returning consciousness. He stretched, half turned over, opened his eyes—and then sprang wildly up from the bed, scattering the little group surrounding him to right and left.

"After him!" he called wildly. "There he goes. Come back here, Max Eaglestone. I want my pocketbook! Stop thief! Stop—"

He paused abruptly, and glanced round at the circle of familiar faces with a half amazed, half incredulous, expression.

Then he gave a sheepish grin.

"Bob," he said to Pettibone, "I've had the meanest dream I ever had in all my life."

He let himself be assisted back to bed, and lay there in silence a few moments with his eyes closed.

Then he raised himself excitedly on one elbow.

"Why, no, Bob," he exclaimed, "it ain't no dream. It's only that I've remembered them lost six years of mine.

"I know now why I recollected that old shack of a hotel of ours. I had made considerable money on the market one summer, and Max Eaglestone got me to come down there and stay while he was running it under the name of the Hotel Kingston."

"Max Eaglestone?" interrupted Pettibone. "Was not that a name you went under yourself?"

"Not on your life," indignantly. "My name is Samuel J. Talbot, and always was, and I never saw any cause to change it at any stage of the game. No, Bob; this Eaglestone was a half-brother of mine, though I didn't know it, and had never heard of him until after I quit Peplona that time, and came down East.

"Still, I guess he was my relative, all right; every one said we looked as like as two peas. But, I'm free to say that, brother or no brother, I never cottoned to the chap, and after that summer at the hotel, I never saw anything of him until the morning of my accident.

"I met him then on a Subway train, and rode down as far as the Bridge with him. On the way we got to talking about large amounts of money, and so fell into a dispute as to what a thousand-dollar bill looks like.

"Well, as it happened, I had at that moment six one-thousand-dollar bills in my pocketbook—I was bringing it along with me to close up a real-estate deal I had on hand—and, to prove my point, I foolishly flashed the roll.

"Eaglestone took it, stuck the book in his pocket, and said in a kind of a kidding way: 'I guess I'll keep this.'

"Well, naturally, I thought he was joshing, and laughed, too; but, bless you, when we struck the 'all out' station, he was up and out of the car, and half-way across the platform before I knew we were there.

"It didn't take me long to tumble, however, and after him I went lickety-split. I caught one glimpse of him over across Park Row as I reached the top of the stairs, and again after him I went. But I guess there is where the street-car and brewery truck intervened, 'cause I don't remember anything more."

"Then Max Eaglestone must be still alive?" broke in Pettibone in a tone which was almost one of regret.

"Oh, no; he isn't," corrected the doctor, who had been one of the most interested listeners to Talbot's narrative, and had evidently reserved his information as a suitable climax to the story. "I knew the man well, and I can tell you positively that he died of pneumonia last fall, over in a little shanty just beyond the Gravesend race-track.

"Gentlemen," he added solemnly, "I guess from what I have heard this Max Eaglestone was a bad man; but, even so, his death must surely have expiated all his crimes.

"It was the most awful I have ever witnessed."

CHAPTER XVI.

WHEN THE DAWN BROKE.

THAT storm was one of the most disastrous ever known along the Stony Island coast.

Monster waves, tossing high their foam-crowned crests, rolled in, one after another, upon the low, sandy shore, and retired leaving ruin and devastation in their wake.

Stony Island itself was literally engulfed. The streets were flooded, the piers and bathing-houses shattered, the flimsy shacks down toward the ocean knocked about and overturned by the force of the great combers as though they had been hen-coops.

Peplona Park, being farther away from the sea, suffered immeasurably less; but, even so, the damage was great.

Talbot recognized that this must be so; and, in spite of the shock which he had experienced, insisted on repairing at once to his threatened domain.

Out in the very heart of the tempest the two partners sallied, and with whatever assistance they could hastily gather, spent the night in fighting the raging elements.

In the cold, gray dawn, when the storm had at last spent its fury, they faced each other, pale and haggard as a result of the hours of stress and strain.

"Well, we got off better than most, Bob," said Talbot, with shaking voice; "but, even so, we'll have to confess that we're knocked out. If we had a couple of thousand dollars we could put a force of men on here, and get everything as good as it ever was by ten o'clock; but without a thousand cents between us—"

He could not finish. He turned away to hide the tears of bitter disappointment which had risen to his eyes.

Just then two figures entered at the gateway, battered and broken by the wind. They were shrouded in mackintoshes, and carried umbrellas before their faces; but, for all that, Pettibone recognized them as Harrison Gray and his daughter.

"What in the dickens can they want here?" he exclaimed amazedly. "And at such a time of day, too?"

He was not to be left long in doubt.

"Good morning, gentlemen," called the old financier cheerily, as he approached, for under Marian's arguments he, too, had dismissed all animus against Talbot, and had agreed to take the medicine-man at his present rating. "No doubt you are a little surprised to see us out so early; but my daughter insisted that we should find you here on the grounds, and she would not consent to wait.

"She has become greatly interested in this enterprise of yours," he went on briskly, "and believes that it is going to be a sure money-maker. In fact, so positive is she of this, that she feels she would like a share of the profits.

"To come to the point, then, she wants to know if it would be possible for her to buy an interest in the concern, and has brought me along to act as her agent in the negotiations.

"In short, what we desire to know is, are you two willing to sell a third interest in the project; and, if so, how much do you want for it?"

Pettibone started up with an air of evident resentment.

"We are not asking for charity, Mr. Gray," he said shortly.

"Nor is any one offering it to you," coolly retorted the old gentleman. "Possibly, if it had not been for last night's wreckage, this offer would not have been made. Nevertheless, it is bona fide; my daughter is really anxious to acquire an interest.

"Still, if you do not care to sell, but would like a loan—for I appreciate that the damage from last night's storm must heavily tax your available resources—she or I, if you prefer to deal with me, will be most happy to accord you any accommodation you may consider necessary."

"Indeed, we thank you, Mr. Gray," cried Pettibone, stung now with contrition for his churlishness. "But there is no use in trying to deceive you. If we should sell or borrow from you now, it would be simply taking your money upon false pretenses. Even if all last night's havoc were repaired; you would still be buying into a gamble, for we have got to make good the very first day we open up, or the sheriff will have hold of us the next."

"Ah!" commented the magnate, raising his eyebrows. "Your liabilities, then—"

"Run well up into five figures," answered Pettibone.

"And your assets?"

"What you see," with a comprehensive wave of his hand about the rain-swept and dismantled enclosure. "Sixty-seven cents in money, and—our hopes."

"How much cash would it take to get things into shape here again?" demanded old Gray.

Talbot took it on himself to answer.

"Two thousand dollars would make it as good as it ever was by ten o'clock," he asserted, repeating his former statement.

"Then, why not let me advance—" the millionaire commenced to urge; but Pettibone interrupted him with an excited shout.

"We don't need any advance," he cried elatedly, for a sudden inspiration had flashed upon him. "Talbot has six thousand dollars in cash belonging to him this minute, which he has only to claim to get hold of."

His partner stared at him, as though he thought Pettibone had suddenly taken leave of his senses.

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "This ain't no time for jokin', it don't seem to me."

"But you have, Sam," insisted the artist. "In the pocketbook which Eaglestone stole from you, and which, in his haste to get away, he dropped at the foot of the Subway steps."

Then, in rapid, excited sentences, he told them how he had located the wallet, and where it had been taken, explaining meanwhile to Gray and Marian concerning Talbot's connection with Eaglestone, and of the latter's end.

"Well," said Gray, not without a trace of relief in his tones, when Pettibone had finished his story, "since you were unwilling to sell an interest when you had only sixty-seven cents in your treasury, I suppose it is useless to ask you now that you are financially established."

He laughed indulgently, as though he considered the incident closed.

"Well, I don't know," hesitated Talbot, glancing uneasily toward his associate. "It may be some little time before we can get our hands on that six thousand dollars, and in the meantime a trifle of spare cash in the exchequer won't do us any harm. If Miss Gray wants to buy as a strict business proposition, and not merely to help us out, why, for my part, I'm willin' to sell."

Pettibone heard this announcement with indignation; and if looks could have slain,

Talbot would have ended his earthly career on the moment.

"I shall certainly not sell," declared the painter stiffly. "Especially not to Miss Gray."

At the ungracious words she turned the battery of her eyes upon him, and forced him to meet her gaze. He stood it for a moment, then wavered, and with a little shamed laugh, threw up his arms in token of surrender.

"I'm a surly idiot, Miss Gray," he confessed. "If you would really like an interest in Peplona Park, you can have any part of it you want."

And while they ratified the contract, the sun came up upon a cloudless day, a bright harbinger of prosperity to the newly formed partnership.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE HOUR OF VICTORY.

TALBOT'S enthusiastic prediction of what might be expected from fine weather was found not to be overstated. With the double attraction of Stony Island, and the spectacle of devastation wrought by the storm, to entice them, it was a record-breaking crowd which descended upon the popular resort that holiday.

They came by trolley, by boat, in buggies and carriages, trains and automobiles, an enormous multitude, to be likened only to the descent of a flock of locusts. It really seemed as though the great city up the bay must be depopulated for the day, so many of its denizens were assembled here.

And having arrived, and once inspected the wreckage along the ocean front, what was left for the throng to do? All the old places of amusement were either destroyed or so badly battered by the storm of the night before that they were unable to take advantage of the occasion.

Many of them, of course, did make an attempt to give a performance, but amid drenched and water-soaked environments it will be readily believed that such efforts were far from scoring a success, and the audiences, disappointed and unsatisfied, hurriedly betook themselves elsewhere in search of the amusement they were seeking.

Elsewhere?

Where else was there to go, save to Peplona Park, the one enterprise on the island which was in shape to receive the horde of visitors?

Early in the day the crowd discovered this, and thereafter, throughout the long hours, there was no cessation in the steady stream of humanity which flowed through the clicking turnstiles.

Promptly at ten o'clock the high board fence along the front was removed under the direction of the energetic Talbot, and the huge, glittering arch which formed the main entrance was disclosed to public view.

Immediately there was a charge upon the waiting ticket-sellers from the crowd without, and to Talbot's worn and wearied face returned its familiar smile—a smile which continually grew and widened as the day progressed, until it reached a limit beyond which it could not extend.

Pettibone caught a sketch of it while it was at high tide, so to speak, and that all-embracing grin has since been reproduced on thousands of posters and dead walls as the standard trade-mark and sign manual of Peplona Park.

The success of the new place was instantaneous and unquestionable. People went away from it during the day; but it was only for the purpose of seeking out their friends and inducing these to return with them.

Everything was praised, admired, wondered at. The visitors could not believe their own eyes that such a place of amusement as this could possibly exist in a spot which had been so absolutely given over to fraud and fake as the old Stony Island.

"Why, it is a veritable World's Fair," they would exclaim. "Here, at last, is a place where nobody need be ashamed to be seen."

The comments of that crowd alone, the descriptions of the place they carried back to their relatives and friends, were worth hundreds of thousands of dollars to Talbot and Pettibone as a simple matter of advertisement.

Long before six o'clock there was ample money in their strong-box to meet not only the one night's expense of the electric lighting which Talbot had proposed to pay, but even to back up his bluff and settle the whole month's account in advance.

Miss Gray was so happy over the success which had been achieved that she was almost in hysterics, and it must be confessed that neither Talbot nor Pettibone were very much better.

In fact, if any one of the three had been asked to give a simple and succinct account of just what he or she did throughout that eventful day, it is very doubtful if either of them would have been able to comply with the request.

At last, after the sun had set, and the gray dusk was beginning to steal in from the ocean, the two younger members of the partnership started to ascend the lofty tower which upreared itself in the center of the enclosure.

Talbot was about to accompany them, but he received a significant glance from his friend, and discreetly discovered that he had business of importance necessitating his presence elsewhere.

Arrived at the summit of the tower, the two stood in silence a moment, glancing out over the brilliant scene below them—the gilt and crimson roofs of temple and pagoda, the stretches of woodland, the mirror-like surfaces of streamlet and lagoon, all bathed in the faint glow of the dying sunset.

Then Pettibone touched a button upon an electric switchboard at his side, and out flashed a strand of colored lights depending from the tower. They blazed and scintillated like a stream of flashing gems, and the girl beside him clapped her hands in delighted admiration.

One after another he pressed the buttons upon the board until the whole park was outlined in a continuous ribbon of fire, and the tower upon which they stood rose a single great shaft of pure radiance.

"Beautiful! Beautiful!" she murmured. "And this is the realization of the artistic dream which you have treasured in your heart all these months?"

"It is the realization of one dream, Marian Gray," he whispered; "but I cherish another and a dearer one which is not yet fulfilled. Dare I hope that it, too, may find its realization?"

An hour or so later they met Talbot, energetic as ever, hurrying about through their mutual domain, and confided to him the wonderful news.

"Great!" he commented briskly. "We'll have the wedding right here in the park, in a specially constructed chapel made out of bottles of Peplona."

"Not much, you won't," laughingly demurred Pettibone. "This is a little private partnership which I am going into, with which Peplona has nothing to do."

"Nothing to do with it?" fairly roared Talbot, aroused to frenzy by such shameless ingratitude. "Why, man alive, Peplona done it all!"

(The end.)

WINE OF SPRING.

FILL me my cup of life with the cool, spiced wine of the spring,
Scent of the brooding pines in the hill-breeze murmuring;
Sweet of the beechland shade and the dogwood's blossoming.
Fill me the gipsy flagon, full to the brim, and then—
I will drink to life, and the heart of life, afar from the world of men.

Fill me my cup of love with the sweet of the upland breeze,
The kiss of the rain-wet hollows, mist-green with the budding trees;
And the heart of the earth unfolded in the arms of the waiting seas.
Fill me the gipsy flagon, full to the brim, and then—
I will drink to love, and the soul of love, afar from the world of men.

Fill me my cup of joy with the wild, sweet lure of the spring,
Call of the vagrant trails through the green earth loitering;
Lilt of the night-wind's song through the gray woods whispering.
Fill me the gipsy flagon, full to the brim, and then—
I will drink to joy, and the heart of joy, afar from the world of men.

Martha Haskell Clark.

Angelina's Actor

By C. Mac Lean Savage

ANGELINA found herself at the depot, waiting for the 4:30 P.M. train.

For weeks she had debated it *pro* and *con*. *Pro*, with a feeling of inward joy; *con*, with the idea of righteous pride.

Yet after all the brain-wrangling and under-the-covers soliloquies, she was there waiting—waiting for him.

He wasn't on the four-thirty after all. She stamped a tiny foot and pursed her lips. It seemed to lift a burden from her shoulders. He didn't come and she was there to meet him—the obligations to her heart-strings were paid.

She walked through the waiting-room and turned up the street toward the town. She came back again and waited for the five-seventeen however.

He was there, check sack-suit, Paddock overcoat, battered suit-case, and all—just the same as when she had last seen him. The curly black hair, the clear-cut face—even the greeting of "Hallo, Angie, kid!" Nothing had changed.

She thought, though, there was a little less sparkle in the pale blue eyes.

She was too self-conscious at first to speak. They plodded up the steep cobble street that led to a conventional small town "Main Street." At the corner thereof, the man's eyes were caught by a red-brick, gilt-cupolated, white-woodwork-trimmed building; altogether a gingerbread-looking affair.

"What have we here, Angie?" he asked.

"Oh, I forgot. That's our new post-office."

"Oho! Welcome to our city. We've a Flatiron Building of our own!"

"Frank—you're teasing!"

"No, honest. It's a real classy edifice, believe me," he answered, laughing. Then, in a changed voice:

"You know it's mighty sweet of you to come down here and meet me, Angie. I think it's just bully of you!"

Of course, all sorts of pretty things to say flashed through Angelina's brain, such as: "I'm glad to do it, Frank," or, "It's such a long time since I've seen you."

She said nothing, though, just lowered her head and looked at the toe of her shoe —looked at the toe of her shoe and blushed as she always did when he spoke to her in that soft way.

"Well, Frank," she said at length, "here's the house, and I must get supper before I go to the store. Will—will I see you again?"

"Surest thing you know, Angie, kid. Why not?"

"B—but are you going to be here long?"

"Um-hum— Maybe for good."

She blushed at her shoe again; but "Good night, Frank," was all she said.

Now it wasn't very often that Angelina hummed while helping to prepare supper, for the simple reason that she had nothing to hum about. Household duties kept her busy all day, and it was but seldom she had an "afternoon off." She hummed though, through her supper, yes, hummed afterward, hummed herself into her hat and coat and out the door.

Her mother wondered at that, wondered, too, why the dishes were washed so quickly and so cleanly. Mothers know these symptoms, or at least they can surmise.

It was a man, anyway. Angelina's mother figured on it being a new soda-water clerk. She didn't know Frank Corrigan was back again.

A chocolate-colored cow stood in a pea-green and ocher meadow, while a lemon-yellow sunset reflected in a Prussian-blue pond. This description is not one of nature, neither is it from the hand of a member of the "Impressionistic" school.

In fact, it was painted on a mirror that faced Angelina's desk. Above it was the command to "Drink Dingalac" in purple and orange letters. Angelina didn't drink it, for she was the cashier at the Clover Candy-Shop. Before the mirror ran the soda counter, bearing other commanding signs to drink something else that sounded like the other—signs in maroon glass, crinkly tinfoil-lettered, striving to compete with the mirror.

Angelina's desk was flanked right and left by huge trays of sparkling gumdrops, nougats, and "fruit-bars." Glass jars of peppermint-sticks and assorted chocolates formed the background. On the gilded wire arrangement that surrounded the desk itself was the information to "Buy soda-checks here."

In the midst of this succulent revelry, behind the wire, sat Angelina herself—and still she hummed softly.

"Feelin' kind o' good, Miss Spriggs?" asked Obadiah, the red-haired clerk.

"Why not?" she answered. "I've nothing to complain about."

"Humph! How anybody kin be happy at this slav'ry, I dunno. I'm quittin' when I git somethin' better!"

To this remark, Angelina merely raised her eyebrows. "Quittin' when I git somethin' better" was an old song of Obadiah's.

You will notice that he addressed Angelina as "Miss Spriggs." That wasn't his fault. Indeed, he had tried many times during the two years they had been employed together to call her by her "given name," even going so far as to offer the inducement that she might call him "Obadiah."

To this she had only tossed her head and given him a haughty "I guess not!" As for addressing him, which she often had to do, she never called him anything.

The hands on the big clock (which also bore a decoration on its face advocating still another beverage) pointed to nine-thirty, and still Angelina hummed. There was a good reason for her gaiety.

Frank Corrigan had come home from the road it is true; but Frank had done that before. In fact, he did it every summer, some springs, and an occasional winter—yet he always went back again. This had been going on for six years. Why, then, does Angelina still hum during the "rush hour," when prayer meeting is out and she is busiest? A single sentence was the cause.

"Maybe for good," Frank had said.

At last the clock struck ten-thirty. Angelina donned her imitation pony-skin coat and pale blue knitted hat and started for home, refusing Obadiah's usual suggestion to "See you to yer door."

Leaning against a lamp-post on the street corner, she saw the uncertain figure of a tall man. She quickened her pace, when a cheery "Hallo, Angie, kid!" halted her.

"Goodness, Frank, what brings you out?"

And he said it, just as she hoped he would:

"I thought I'd wait for you, Angie."

A little farther on he spoke again, the purport pleased her still more.

"Have you time for a little walk, Angie? I want to talk to you."

"All right, Frank," she answered, and together they strolled on.

Suddenly the man kicked a tin can that lay on the brick pavement in the way of his foot—kicked it viciously and sent it clattering into the street. He gave vent to a disgusted "Bah!"

Angelina gently squeezed his arm and asked:

"What's wrong, Frank? Can't you tell me?"

"Wrong — everything's wrong, Angie!"

His voice was guttural with suppressed rage.

"Look at me, will you, a man of twenty-six without a dollar to my name. Worse yet—I had to telegraph my mother for enough to get here, and she hasn't any too much to spare, goodness knows. What am I doing it for—what?

"Because a fool of a school-teacher told me when I was a boy that I could act. I wish some one would tell me I couldn't—but they don't. Plenty of praise I get; but very little money. Every hand is pointed at the will-o'-the-wisp ahead of me and I follow, follow on. Oh, I'm sick of it, Angie, sick of it!"

What a wonderful night was this for Angelina Spriggs! The night itself was raw; a blanket fog hung over dripping tree-tops, sodden echoed the footfall; yet it was a wonderful night to her.

She had heard the "sick of it" plaint before; but there didn't seem to be the earnestness in his voice that there was now. She stole a glance at his face, his jaw was set, his lips tight together. Surely he did—the Fates were not fooling her—he did mean it this time!

"Angie," his voice was soft again. "Would you be glad, if I did give it up?"

"You know I would, Frank."

"Then I will, I'll be a slave to this 'troupin',' game no longer. Watch me!"

And Angelina, choking down a little sob, blushed at the toe of her damp shoe.

So, unto the town of Coswego returned Frank Corrigan, and unto Angelina Spriggs came a perfect peace.

Angelina didn't lack male admirers—witness Obadiah. Though not a beauty, she had the piquant prettiness of the healthy "small town girl." Why, then, this clinging to a periodical love affair? She didn't really know herself, except that when compared to Frank, the male animal of Coswego "fell flat."

Then, too, first impressions with her were lasting. She had known her actor when she was but thirteen. Things had happened between then and now that were hard to forget.

As the weeks grew into months, and still he stayed on, she was full of a happiness she feared even to think of. It was an intangible sensation, like one with a hidden treasure they dared not mention for fear it should be taken away.

No more would she envy, yet pity the other girls in their walks in the park. Beside her now was a tall figure, who didn't wear the conventional "box" overcoat, the black serge suit, the white satine "ready-made" four-in-hand tie.

She didn't have to listen to "drool" about the "noo skatin'-rink" or "the girls to dancin'-schools." The man with her, besides looking well in anything, talked intelligently, spoke softly, laughed gaily—in short, he was Frank Corrigan and he—well, he had her first kiss at that Sunday-school picnic so long ago.

But wonders ceased not.

That "somethin' better" that Obadiah dreamed of came at last. What it was, matters not now. What does, is that there was a vacancy in the Clover Candy-Shop.

Yes, he took it—Angelina didn't say much to persuade him, either—Mr. Frank Corrigan, former light comedian, in a white coat, mixed sundaes, "temptations," ice-cream sodas, and all the things those signs threatened one to drink.

Still the days came and went. Still Angelina had to but look through the wire of her cage and there he would be. If she called, he would answer her. She didn't though, unless she had to. She even feared to hum, lest the tremor of her very breath would disturb the placid pool of her happiness.

Matters stood that way for quite a while, through the spring and into the summer. Together they were most of the day, and Sundays at parties and "socials." Frank even went so far as to look at some five-dollars-down-five-dollars-a-month lots in the suburbs.

He took Angelina with him, and hinted at bungalows and wondered "what a cottage would cost to put up." The thought of

what was hidden behind these reflections made her sadly content. Yet the words that she looked for, waited for, hungered for, never came, so she let things rest as they were, still fearing the will-o'-the-wisp, still happy just to see and be with him.

It was a night in July. A euchre-party was to be given by one of the "younger set" of the working or semiworking girls of the town. Of course, Angelina was invited; of course, Frank Corrigan accompanied her.

The event passed off with the usual "small talk," lemonade, and ten-cent-store prizes. Angelina would have enjoyed it immensely; did, in fact, until Tessie Oliver committed that never-to-be-forgiven indiscretion. It came in one of those lulls in the conversation that are fabled to be "twenty minutes to something."

"Oh, *Mis*ter Corrigan," said Tessie. "Won't you please recite something for us?"

Of course there was a storm of assent from every one, and Frank put on his very best professional bashfulness. There were the usual coaxings, particularly on the part of Tessie (Angelina always hated the way she said "*Mis*ter Corrigan"), and Frank rendered Poe's "The Bells."

Never had anything like it been heard in that parlor before! The advent of a "real" actor in their midst was an unheard-of novelty. Unanimous was the praise and unanimous were the cries for more. Frank waited for the hush and then gave "Robert of Sicily."

The company sat in the parlor and Frank stood in the dining-room behind open folding-doors, a sort of impromptu proscenium arch it was—the soft light from yellow-globed lamps shone on his face.

Angelina watched the emotions come and go, saw the fire kindle in his eyes, heard the rise and fall of his voice. Slowly he warmed to his work, and with every sentence from his lips a cold terror clutched her heart.

Now it was coming—his voice rose to a climax, up and up mounted the notes, ringing out with true dramatic fervor.

A panic, sudden and overmastering, seized the girl—she screamed, clutched at the air and fell forward upon the floor.

The night was dark as Angelina and Frank walked slowly home; neither could see the other's face, but each felt what the other was thinking.

"I suppose you know, Angie," he said at last. "I've got to go again."

"Yes, Frank," came in a colorless voice.

"You see," he went on, "it's the old story. I'm good at this thing—I'm liable to make a hit some day. It's the will-o'-the-wisp again, I must follow on."

"It isn't only that, Frank," she was struggling bravely to say it. "You can't stand it here, can you?"

"No, Angie, to tell the truth I couldn't. What have I got? All day and half the night mixing sodas and making sundaes. You know, too, I'm not much at euchre-parties. As for the bunch here—oh, Lord, look at Obadiah!

"Don't you worry though, maybe I'll come back when I make good—and, if I don't—well, we can't help that. Good-by, Angie, kid—I think a lot of you; but this thing's in my system like a drug habit, I guess. Good-by!"

A tight pressure of her hand and he was gone.

All the next day she held out while she made beds, dusted furniture, and went through her household drudgery; then just before supper she sobbed aloud. Her mother heard and understood.

"Angelina, listen child," said she. "It'll always be this way. Don't waste your life. There are plenty of other men. Look at Obadiah, he's doing well in the furniture store, and there are more that would give you a better life than Frank Corrigan, mark my words."

Angelina only sniffed and sat down to her supper. Afterwards she put on her hat and coat, and still sniffing, went to the store.

There, before her, was the chocolate-colored cow and all the signs, behind the counter was another man in Frank's white coat.

A shadow fell across her desk; she looked up.

"Good evenin', Miss Spriggs."

It was Obadiah.

She nodded.

"What's the trouble, ye don't look so cheerful as usual?"

Angelina gave him a stony stare and her chillest tones:

"I beg your pardon — what is it you wish?"

"G—gimee an ice-cream sody-check."

She passed the slip of pasteboard through the wire.

Lucky Jimmie Hayes

By

Frank Williams

ANYBODY that goes to a charity fair with only the price of admission in his jeans is altogether mean. The admission price is only a foretaste of what is coming to you inside the big tent.

You can't be a piker and walk round to the booths and never take a chance on anything. You're too liable to run into your pet enemies, who will brand you as a sport of the paste variety.

So when Jimmie Hayes set out for the Blind Babies' Fair he took with him half of his week's salary—namely, six dollars.

He didn't know anything about the fair, and he cared perhaps less about it—as a fair. But there was a pair of blue eyes that he did care about, and he knew those eyes would be behind the counter at one booth. But he didn't know which one.

So he thought he would be on the safe side and take a big enough wad so he would be taking no chances of being unable to take chances at her booth.

After he arrived, Jimmie found himself having a lots better time than he thought possible. There were many pairs of eyes to cater to, and he found himself judging the respective merits of black, brown, blue, and hazel as an expert appraises the good points of a horse.

Miss Brown Eyes took a dollar away from him on a gold watch.

Miss Black lightened his roll to the extent of another dollar on some embroidery, which she convinced him he could send to his sister or mother—if he won it.

Miss Hazel Eyes lifted two dollars as a chance on a house and lot over in a neighboring swamp.

He had two dollars left, and suddenly realized that he had failed in his mission of hunting down the blue eyes.

He began an assiduous hunt. Finally Jimmie located them behind a big touring-car with a red body and nice shiny brasswork.

He forgot these details when he looked at the eyes, however.

"So you're hocking this parlor ornament, are you?" he queried jocularly, indicating the touring-car.

"Guessed right the very first time," replied Miss Blue Eyes, smiling sweetly. "Chances are only two dollars each."

Jimmie pulled out his wallet, extracted the only money he had, and slapped the bills down on the hood of the machine.

"She's mine now, I suppose," he said, reaching into the bag held out to him by Miss Blue Eyes. He pulled forth a slip of paper with a number on it.

"You keep that number until the winning ones are announced," instructed his enchantress. "I hope you get the car," she concluded, turning sweetly to another young man.

Jimmie Hayes put his wallet back in his pocket with the slip of paper carefully folded up, and strolled about.

Then he realized that he had no more use for the fair, having no money, and that the fair had no more use for him, for the same reason.

On the way home he reflected on the

evening's entertainment, in which eyes of various hues played no picayune part. He thought over the articles on which he had taken chances.

"I could certainly use that watch," he said to himself. "I know a certain pair of eyes that would sparkle at the sight of the embroidery, and I might possibly have use for the house and lot. But that automobile is one too many for me.

"If by any ironic turn of fate that touring-car is left on my hands, I will be about as much at home as a guinea-pig in a balloon."

The more he thought about the possibility of winning the automobile the more impossible such a situation became.

"Here I am, a clerk at twelve per. I know from friends of mine that the confounded machines cost more for upkeep than they do to purchase. Wouldn't I look fine sporting round in a machine like that? I'd have somebody out riding with me and —*pop!* would go a tire.

"That would mean about fifty dollars for a new one. A whole month's salary! *Wow!* Say, those blue eyes must have hypnotized me for fair. Talk about Blind Babies. I guess I'm the prize one of the lot."

He turned into the boarding-house and went up to his room.

"What would the boss say if he saw me sporting round in that car? It would be me for another job. I don't suppose," he mused as he undressed, "that there would be any chance of getting my money back on this number and using it at some other booth."

Jimmie dismissed the idea from his mind at once.

"That would be a mucker trick. Besides, I'd hate to face that pair of blue eyes while I was doing it.

"No. I'll just hang on to this number and trust to luck not to win that car. I guess I haven't one chance out of a thousand or two, anyway, so I'll just forget it."

With that Jimmie Hayes turned out the light and, comforted by this last thought, slept the sleep of the falsely reassured.

The next evening found him on the way to the Blind Babies' Fair. It was the last night of the fair, and the prize-winners would all be announced.

"I've got chances on four things, and I might as well be on hand to see somebody else carry them off," he told himself.

The fair was jammed. Jimmie could scarcely get near the booths where the announcements were made. He was a perfectly secure spectator, however, for his luck was appallingly bad.

He didn't have a ghost of a show at the watch. The embroidery went to a butcher down the block. The house and lot went to a two-year-old baby, whose father had taken a chance for it.

"Humph," grunted Jimmie, "there are two pretty good examples of the irony of fate. The only one that can beat them will be for me to win that automobile."

The machine was the last of the prizes to be awarded.

The crowd, with one impulse, surged round the car, while the man who was to draw the prize-winning number mounted, blindfolded, into the tonneau.

Jimmie was on the outskirts of the crowd. He pulled his wallet out, took the piece of paper from it, and took a look at the number.

Miss Blue Eyes mounted beside the blindfolded man, carrying in her hand a bag in which were duplicates of all the numbers that had been drawn.

"Mr. Bellows will draw three numbers from the bag. I will announce each one. The third number will be the winner."

She held the bag out to the waiting Mr. Bellows.

A hush fell over the crowd. There had been considerable rivalry over the buying of chances for the car. Several men, in particular, had bought a large number of slips and were keen to win. Now their friends were on hand to cheer when the drawing revealed which was the lucky one.

Mr. Bellows reached into the bag and drew out a slip of paper, which he handed to Miss Blue Eyes.

"Number two hundred and fifty-six," she read aloud.

One of the men who had invested heavily groaned audibly. His friends echoed his complaint.

"Number three thousand eight hundred and ninety," read Miss Blue Eyes again when the noise had subsided.

Jimmie looked at the slip of paper in his hand and gave a frantic squeak.

"Missed me by one," he gurgled.

He felt better now. The next number would hit some other poor fellow. Jimmie folded up the slip of paper and put it in his pocket.

Miss Blue Eyes drew out the third slip from the plump fingers of Mr. Bellows.

The assemblage was as silent as the tomb.

"Number three thousand eight hundred and ninety-one."

Jimmie Hayes leaned on the surrounding atmosphere for support and it gave way with him. He brought up against another man, who straightened him up suddenly.

Meanwhile Miss Blue Eyes was calling:

"Who has number three thousand eight hundred and ninety-one?"

Jimmie held up his hand and said weakly:

"I have."

Miss Blue Eyes smiled sweetly and said:

"In the name of the Blind Babies I congratulate you. You can leave the machine here till to-morrow if you wish. But it must be out of the way by twelve o'clock."

The crowd melted away in disappointment that was silent.

Jimmie found himself standing alone by his newly acquired burden.

"What am I to do with the thing?" he asked himself weakly. "I can't run it, and if I could I couldn't afford to. Where will I put it. How will I keep it?"

The poor young man was at his wit's end.

The manager of the fair approached.

"I suppose you will run your car home to-night," he said ingratiatingly.

Jimmie Hayes looked at him a moment. Then he said sarcastically:

"No, I guess not to-night. My garage is overcrowded now. I'll give away one of the old machines in the morning and then come down for this one."

"Very good, sir. We will take good care of it till you call."

And the manager, very much impressed with the young millionaire, left as abruptly as he had come.

Jimmie stared after him. Then he started slowly for the door.

On his way home he pondered deeply.

"By George!" he exclaimed, "I know what I'll do. Mr. Chugger, one of the men at the house, can advise me about this fix I'm in."

He quickened his pace and was soon at the steps of his boarding-house. He was agreeably surprised to run into the estimable Mr. Chugger at that point.

"Just the man I want to see!" exclaimed Jimmie, relieved.

"I don't owe you any money," said the other confidently.

"Of course not. But I heard you were an automobile specialist, and I need some advice."

"Advice is my trump card. What's the fuss?"

Then Jimmie Hayes unburdened his soul.

The other guffawed heartily when the recital was over.

"You are either ignorance personified or else have a dome as thick as the Pyramids. The thing to do is to advertise the car in the papers as a brand-new machine. You can make a big haul.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," he resumed at last. "I know a garage near here that will let me put your machine up for a few days free. That solves the problem of what you will do with your new burden up to the time she's sold."

"Fine."

"In exchange for that I want to be your chauffeur. I haven't had my foot on a pedal in so long that I'm crazy for the sensation. You'll have to be giving the men who reply to your advertisements demonstration rides, anyway, and you can't run the car."

Jimmie went up to his room in a much happier frame of mind than he had been an hour before.

He spent the next hour, late as it was, writing advertisements for the papers. Then he turned in.

He was up bright and early next morning. On the way to the office he dropped in on the various morning and evening newspapers and left the "copy" for insertion in the next issues.

Then he went on, and arrived at his desk just in time to be hard at work when the boss blew in.

Jimmie Hayes, be it here recorded, worked in a tea and coffee broker's office. He felt about as much interest in his job as a sparrow feels for a rattlesnake. He had left high school with a keen ambition to become a doctor, but his father had frowned down this ambition.

Now, as he thought of selling the car, his hopes brightened. Perhaps, after all, he could achieve his one ambition.

He was engrossed in this rosy vision when Mr. Black, the boss, sent for him.

Mr. Black had the morning paper open on his desk.

"I see by the papers, Hayes, that you won an automobile at the Blind Babies' Fair."

"Yes, sir."

Jimmie shifted from one foot to the other. What could this mean?

"I just want to advise you, sir," continued Mr. Black, "that I hope you will be discreet in the use of that smelly thing. If you get into any scrapes and achieve any unenviable newspaper publicity, this firm will not be very anxious to keep you from hunting a new position.

"We are too well known to have any such odium attached to our name. Besides, sir, I do not see how a young gentleman on your income can maintain such a luxury."

"I am trying now to—" began Jimmie.

"In short, I see no conceivable good in such a contraption, and hope you will take the quickest means of getting rid of the car you have."

"That was my intention, sir," said Jimmie, "and I thank you for your warning. While I have the car I shall be careful not to run into the embrace of some policeman."

The first evening's trial of the car was an unqualified success. Mr. Chugger was an adept at driving. He could shave the whiskers off the front leg of any horse on the avenue.

He took corners so that you thought you were going over *sure*—but didn't. He could smell a mounted policeman a quarter of a mile off and be traveling at a highly decorous pace by the time that worthy was close at hand.

Oh, as a chauffeur, Mr. Chugger was a blue-ribbon article.

The next night on arriving home for supper, Jimmie found a stack of letters for him about a foot high.

They were answers to his advertisements.

Most of them were commonplace enough, saying that the writer was interested and would like to know when he could have a demonstration.

But there was one reply that caught Freddie's attention for more than a moment. It read:

> Will pay fourteen hundred dollars for the car if I can have it at once.

Then it gave the writer's name and address in a beautiful suburb near the city.

Jimmie's eyes opened wide.

"Gee! That fourteen hundred dollars is almost the full price for the car. There isn't another offer like that in the whole list. I think I'll run out there to-night and surprise that fellow."

At the supper-table Jimmie questioned Mr. Chugger.

Did he know the suburb of Woodbury? Yes, very well.

Could he find an address there?

Certainly.

So after supper the two drove off, Mr. Chugger driving and Jimmie in the tonneau, leaning back with an expression of great *ennui* on his features.

It was a beautiful ride. The car passed over silken boulevards and under bending trees in company with a few thousand other machines, some better and some worse.

Mr. Delacourt, the man who had answered the advertisement, proved to be in, and was more than delighted to take a spin.

He sat in the back seat with Jimmie, who regaled him at length with the fine points of his recent acquisition. He dilated on the magento, the carbureter, the spark, and called Mr. Delacourt's particular attention to the graceful shape of the auto's frontal bone in juxtaposition to it's sorosis spring. Also many other kindred subjects, of which the writer wots not.

For an hour the hypnotized Mr. Delacourt rode the boulevards of his own little village, pronounced them more beautiful than they had ever before appeared to him, and landed on his front door-step on the crest of a tidal-wave of enthusiasm.

"By George! A *beautiful* car, Mr. Hayes. I may say a wonderful car. Let's see. My offer was fourteen hundred dollars, wasn't it? Well, that offer stands good."

Jimmie was tingling with joy. He felt the check already in his jeans.

But suddenly a look of concern crossed Mr. Delacourt's features.

"How stupid of me! Here I've promised to buy another car instead. A friend of mine offered me one at a bargain. But it is no such remarkable car as this—"

"Buy both," remarked Jimmie casually.

Mr. Delacourt laughed.

"I can't do that," he said, "but I can give you one chance to get ahead of my friend. He is to deliver his car to my city house to-night at eleven o'clock. My man has a check waiting for him. It happens to be also for fourteen hundred dollars.

"If you can get to the house before the

hour appointed, deliver to the man the note I will give you, and he will turn over to you the check."

"Fine!" ejaculated Jimmie, "and a cinch, too. I guess we can burn up the roads a bit for that fourteen hundred dollars, can't we, Mr. Chugger?"

"We can do anything with this car, if we have to," replied the thoroughly capable chauffeur.

Mr. Delacourt disappeared inside the house for a moment. When he reappeared he bore in his hand the precious note, which he delivered to Jimmie.

"I won't detain you any longer," he said. "If I were you I should go right to the address you will find on the envelope, so as not to run any risk of losing out. I want that car, and I want it badly. So please hurry."

Mr. Chugger put his foot on the pedal, gave the steering-gear a twist, and they were off, Jimmie and his benefactor shouting good nights over the intervening distance.

Now Jimmie looked at the envelope.

He leaned over Mr. Chugger and shouted against the wind:

"Do you know where nine hundred and forty-nine Cheetham Avenue is?"

The driver nodded in silent assent, and Jimmie lay back luxuriously on the Spanish leather cushions to formulate theories of life becoming to his present state of opulence.

Jimmie saw visions of a medical career before him. He conjured up delightful pictures of dissecting rooms where he could mess around to his heart's content. Beyond that was his own little office, with his name in gold letters on the window-pane.

The Spanish leather cushion changed to one of rosy clouds. With the fourteen hundred dollars from the sale of the auto, only one thousand more would be necessary for the attainment of his ambition to go to medical school.

Ah, life was worth living—a thing of beauty and a joy forever.

"Stop!" shouted a voice out of the darkness.

Mr. Chugger removed his foot from the pedal, reluctantly, and jammed on the brake. The car came to a sudden stop, dislodging Jimmie from his state of seraphic content, and bumping him up against the realities of life, which same happened to be the hardwood edge of the front seat.

"Swing your car round so we can get some light on this girl!" continued the voice.

Mr. Chugger backed the car round, and the arc-lights illuminated a peculiar scene.

On the sidewalk a little girl was lying, unconscious. From her right arm the blood spurted in little jerks. Beside and all round her were broken fragments of heavy glass. Over her was bending an older girl, about eighteen, weeping. A small crowd had collected, and was standing around helpless, as any crowd does.

A policeman, evidently one of the officers of the village, and the owner of the voice, was as helpless as the crowd he was trying to hold back.

"I want your machine," he said. "We've got to rush this girl to the hospital. She's badly hurt."

Jimmie Hayes sprang down from the car a different man than the dreamer he had been a moment before.

Now he was alert, practical, energetic.

He bent over the little victim, as she lay so white in the glare of the lamps.

"Quick, officer; get me a stout stick about a foot long!"

Jimmie bent over and held his thumb above the artery that was jetting the blood from that little body, wasting its precious vitality.

"What happened?" queried the young doctor in a low voice, as the officer returned with the required stick.

The older girl interrupted.

While she told the story Jimmie bound his handkerchief tightly around the little arm, then inserted the stick under the knot, and twisted it until the blood almost stopped its flow, so great was the pressure.

"Sister and I," said the older girl, "went over to a neighbors to get a cut-glass pitcher that mother had loaned some time ago. Mary insisted on carrying it. She stumbled and fell right on top of it.

"Mother and father have gone out to play cards, and I don't know how to reach them. What shall we do?"

The voice trailed off pitifully.

Jimmie reflected.

"The officer is right," he said at length. "This child must be hurried to a hospital. She may bleed to death in spite of what I have done. Only our speed can save her. You leave word," turning to the girl, "where you are going, so that your parents will call up as soon as they come in. I want you to go with us.

"Officer, you come to and show us the way to the hospital."

Tenderly, Jimmie fixed a place in the back for the little victim, while the older girl was gone. Then he lifted his charge into the tonneau and sat beside her holding up the injured arms so that the blood would not run down into it.

At this moment the other girl came up. Jimmie motioned her in with him. The officer sat with Mr. Chugger and gave him directions.

"There's no hospital here," he said. "We'll have to run into the nearest one in the city. Start her up. I'll show you the road."

The car leaped forward on the first gear. Then on the second, and finally on the third. The purr of her engine became a whine as the speed increased. Street-lights whirred past in a close procession. The blocks seemed ridiculously short.

But Jimmie was not noticing that.

He had one hand on the heart of the patient. It was a feeble heart now. Its beating was irregular. Now and then it fluttered.

He could not quite stop the blood that kept oozing from the deep, jagged tear that had laid open the tender white arm.

"Hurry—hurry—hurry!" Jimmie found himself repeating under his breath.

As the car whirled into the city limits the troubles increased. Vehicles and cars had to be watched. But Mr. Chugger proved his mettle as a chauffeur. He wove in and out with the utmost recklessness, yet brought no one to grief.

Twice the car was held up for speeding. The first officer, upon the explanation of the one in the car, granted free passage at once. The second officer proved to be a motor-cycle man.

When he was hastily told the state of things by Jimmie, he mounted his motor-cycle and preceded the car at breakneck pace, clearing the way.

With a grind of the brakes the car finally drew up before the hospital.

Jimmie already had the little girl in his arms. He leaped from the machine and dashed up the steps and into the building.

A moment later he reappeared.

"Come in, Mr. Chugger," he said. "We may need you."

The sister was already inside, whither she had followed Jimmie.

The city officer also came in, while the motor-cycle policeman disappeared amid a volley of pops from his motor.

The group waited down in the office, while the doctors up-stairs labored to preserve the flicker of life that still burned in the delicate body before them.

A telephone-bell rang in another office. One of the nurses answered it.

She came back a moment later with soundless steps and motioned to the older sister.

The girl went out to answer the telephone.

A few minutes later she returned. Her face was greatly relieved.

"Father just called up," she announced, "and will be here in a few moments."

Jimmie pulled out his watch.

Just then one of the doctors from up-stairs came down. There was a smile on his lips. Jimmie put back the watch without looking at it.

"Well," cried the doctor, "our little patient was pretty bad, but the stimulants have pulled her through. All she needs now is rest and a chance to regain her strength."

"Isn't that bully?" cried Jimmie enthusiastically. Mr. Chugger grinned delightedly, and the sister began, girl-like, to weep her happiness.

Again Jimmie pulled out his watch. And this time he looked at it. Then he leaped a good-sized leap.

"Half past ten," he cried. "We simply must go. I would have loved to take you home again, but—"

Suddenly a wild shouting rose outside the hospital, about a block down the street.

"Runaway—runaway!" was the thrilling and terror-stricken cry that rang above the babel of voices.

Then could be heard the clatter of hoofs and the rumbling of a heavy wagon as it swayed from side to side on the pavement.

Now, the vague shadow of the erratic approach of the team and its load could be perceived. The thunder of the wagon increased. The hoofs were beating frantically.

And then it burst into the glow of the arc-light on the corner on which the hospital was located.

The horses were a magnificent pair of high-spirited draft animals, and they hauled a brewery wagon loaded with kegs. The seat was driverless.

Jimmie sprang to his feet with an inarticulate cry. But he was too late. The great beasts, frenzied, swung sharply to the

left as they approached the corner. The heavy wagon skidded wildly. Then it swung clear over to the other curb and crashed with terrific force into the perfectly good fourteen hundred dollars' worth of auto belonging to Mr. James Hayes.

The auto crumpled like a model made of tissue-paper.

The maddened team tried to drag auto and brewery wagon along together, but both vehicles were so intertwined that this was impossible, and presently the runaways stopped short, with wild, flashing eyes and heaving flanks.

Jimmie went into the next room to be alone with his grief.

Gone!

Everything gone!

The hopes of years lying a tangled mass of metal and wood in the middle of the street. It wasn't the money in itself that counted. That had only been, at most, a means to an end. But the happiness, the content that the fourteen hundred dollars would have brought to the lonely clerk in a tea-house, the ambition it would have fired in him were dead—as dead as a dead fire can be.

Jimmie was fighting hard against the tears that threatened to burst from his eyes, and the sobs that were eager to rend his breast.

So he sat in the little room off the main office of the hospital, with Mr. Chugger hovering sympathetically round the door, but not daring to go in.

So neither of them noticed the gentleman that hurried up to the hospital and burst into the office with a face white with apprehension.

"Father," cried the girl, who had been waiting eagerly for his arrival. "Mary's all right. She's going to live."

"Thank Heaven!" ejaculated the man, sinking into a chair and mopping his forehead with his handkerchief. "Now, tell me all about it, Esther."

While she did, various vehicle-doctors were trying their best to operate on the vehicular hash in the street, but without a whole lot of success. Several policemen were pushing the crowd that had gathered and the crowd was pushing the policemen, and the usual wiseacres stood on the curb and handed out priceless impractical suggestions gratis.

Ten minutes later, Jimmie Hayes, once more master of himself, rose.

"Come on, Chugger," he said to his erstwhile chauffeur, "let's go home."

The two walked out into the main office of the hospital and made for the door.

"Yes," the doctor was telling the now less distracted father, "that young man saved your daughter's life. If it hadn't been for his knowledge of the tourniquet and the speed of his automobile, we could have accomplished nothing. Ah, there he is now."

The two men swung round face to face with Jimmie and Mr. Chugger.

"Mr. Hayes!" exclaimed the father.

"Mr. Black!" cried Jimmie.

The little group was silent with astonishment at this recognition.

"Did you do all this for my little girl?" faltered Mr. Black, much moved.

"Was it your little girl?" asked Jimmie stupidly.

"Yes, bless her heart. I don't know how I can thank you. And it was in your new car, too. Where is it? I must see it."

"There goes what's left," said the young fellow disconsolately, looking out of the window.

The policemen had finally solved the puzzle of the brewery wagon and the auto, and were dragging the latter on two wheels away from the other wreckage.

"You don't mean to say—" began Mr. Black.

Jimmie nodded.

"The runaway knocked her into a cocked hat," he said.

The office manager stood with mouth open as if unable to comprehend what he had heard.

Then it came on him all at once. This young fellow had gladly run the risk of missing his appointment to sell the auto, in order to save a life. Moreover, he had applied to the case the brains required, just in time to prevent his little girl from bleeding to death.

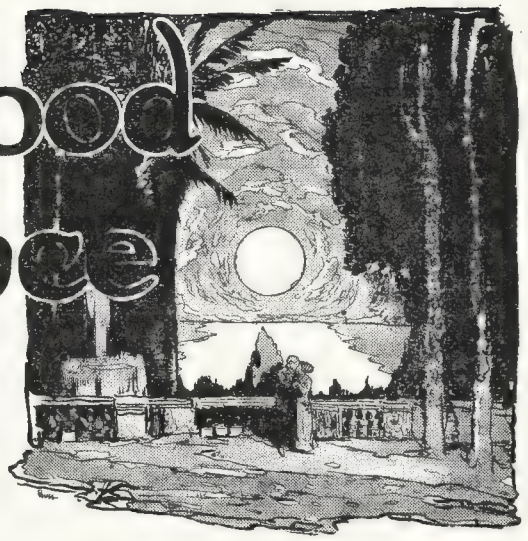
Lastly, his only asset in the world aside from his own ability had been blotted out just as he was about to reap his reward from it.

"Come here, my boy," said Mr. Black gently, leading the way to a settee in one corner of the room.

To-day, on a plate-glass window in one of the best mansions on Madison Avenue, one may read this sign in gold letters:

"James P. Hayes, M.D."

Her Good Prince



By

C. H. Miller

THERE were a thousand noises in the street outside.

Great heavy trucks rumbled over the car-tracks, the fish-man's horn sounded its swan song over his perishing load of sad-eyed fish, *rattlety-bang* went the L trains, and the automobiles' *honk-honk* gave the ambling pedestrian a wild desire to hotfoot it out of the way. But above all the roar and rattle and hum of a great city, and alone by itself in its crystal purity almost like a little bird singing to its mate, they heard the silvery tinkle of the dinner-bell.

"They" were the boarders, and experience had taught them that the cardinal principle of Mrs. Laird's boarding-house was to be on hand when the bell rang.

It was an old-fashioned house, with three flights of stairs leading from the hall bedroom on the top floor at six dollars a week with meals, past the alcove front on the second, that Mrs. Gray had held against all comers for so many years that she was as much a part of the house as its musty smell or the smoked beef and shiny cheese for Sunday tea.

Sometimes Mrs. Gray would feel instinctively that the bell was about to ring, and she would start laboriously down the stairs ahead of the rest. She was slow of foot—or rather, feet, for she had 'em both—and then the rest would pile up behind her like logs on a drive in a mountain torrent when one gets jammed on a rock. Once safely in the dining-room each took his place like a well-trained fire-horse and reached solemnly for his napkin-ring.

To-night Mrs. Gray had jammed the drive on the stairs, and of all days it was the worst that could have been selected—for the new boarder was expected, and an air of pent-up excitement had been hanging over the house all day. He had been there in the morning to engage his room, and as an evidence of good faith had left a paper suit-case.

When they were all seated, he appeared at the doorway of the dining-room, and every one, with true metropolitan courtesy, stopped eating to look at him.

"Here's your place, Mr. Stevens—Stevens, isn't it?" the landlady said dubiously.

"Stevens is right, madam," he replied in such a well-bred voice that the fuzzy-haired stenographer exclaimed to no one in particular:

"Oh, ain't he just grand!"

A new face at the table always seemed for a time to discourage conversation, and so the silence was unbroken save for the gentle lapping of soup. Stevens seemed to eat with a little less of the rhythmic labial accompaniment of his more skilled neighbors, but he applied himself to the task with diligence.

The soup over, each in turn gave satisfactory answer to the question of the waitress:

"Beeferchicken?"

After the first appeal, they all knew it was to be "beeferchicken," for they dis-

tinctly heard her ask old Mrs. Gray. In fact, wasn't it Wednesday night, and could it be anything else? But each in turn waited for the talismanic words of the waitress before he announced his choice.

In a few days Stevens had been accepted as a fixture, and the feast of reason was on again. The young fellow with the cigarette-stained fingers had resumed his daily account of his scrap with the head shipping-clerk. Each night he entertained the frizzly-haired stenographer with the latest developments at the office. To-day it was about being five minutes late, and how:

"I says to him, I says: 'I don't see you wearin' any medals for bein' on time, neither.'

"An' he says to me, he says: 'Well, I'm your superior. I've got a right to be late.'

"An' then I says: 'Well, what do you know about that? Where do you get off at fer bein' late?'"—and much more to the same effect, all of which made the frizzly-haired stenographer hang on his words.

Old man Mayer and his daughter usually ate in silence. She was a delicate looking girl, about twenty-two, with pink and white complexion, and big brown eyes that seemed to melt when you looked at them.

Her father was a German. He was silent, almost morose. He seldom spoke unless some one addressed him, and often his answer would simply be a shrug of his shoulders.

"He's a queer lot to have such a fine girl. I just can't figger him out at all," was Mrs. Laird's opinion.

Mr. Stevens was soon everybody's friend. His big breezy manner even caused old man Mayer to be civil to him. In the evenings he would sit in the little parlor and talk about his adventures in the West. He was in the East to raise some money for a mining enterprise, but as a New York boarding-house could hardly be regarded as a possible source of capital, he was not regarded with suspicion.

With Miss Mayer, Stevens had formed an acquaintance, and finally, when their evenings were spent in the musty parlor sitting on the shiny horsehair sofa, the other boarders had learned to leave them to themselves. Once he donned an unaccustomed evening-suit and took her to the theater.

It was one of the few real pleasures she had ever known. By various devices of the female mind, she had pressed sundry ribbons and inked the worn spots on the gown until she looked the equal of any of them. And after the theater, they went to the big restaurant where the lights are bright and the music is gay, and had supper.

It was fairyland to her, and he was her good prince.

That night, John Stevens sat for a long time in his easy chair in his bedroom and thought long and hard, and at the end was no nearer a conclusion than when he started.

Mrs. Laird seldom wasted much praise, but she did tell the scrub-lady that Mr. Stevens was a gentleman, every inch of him.

"And he is that regular in payin' his board that I have never had to ask him for it yet," which explained why he was such a gentleman from Mrs. Laird's point of view.

Promptly every Monday morning he would give her a new twenty-dollar bill, and she would give him ten dollars in change. Old man Mayer also paid his board Monday morning, but to avoid the necessity of any talk he always left the money at his place at the breakfast table sealed in an envelope.

Mr. Stevens waited until after breakfast to pay his. After old man Mayer had silently eaten his breakfast, he would go out to work. His daughter told Stevens that he was an engraver in a jewelry factory. Stevens knew better, but he was too polite to contradict a lady—especially such a one as Elsa Mayer.

The oracle at Mrs. Laird's was the fat man who sold insurance. It was he alone who indulged in the luxury of a morning paper.

It was always neatly folded and awaiting him at his place when he came in to breakfast. While the meal progressed, he would grunt and wheeze ruminatively and announce the vital news as he gathered it from the head-lines:

"That was a big fire up-town," he would say, or, "I see the Camperdonia is a day late," or somebody broke a record or a bank or his neck.

This morning he mumbled for a long time. It must have been a story of compelling interest. Finally he announced it.

"I see they rounded up a big gang of counterfeiters last night over in Long Island."

Stevens was watching old man Mayer

out of the tail of his eye. He saw him go pale at the first announcement, and then the tight cords let go of his neck when Long Island was mentioned.

Stevens looked long and hard at the girl, and the thoughts went tumbling through his brain like the water over a mill-wheel. As soon as old man Mayer had closed the front door, Stevens said:

"Miss Mayer, may I have a word with you?"

"Why, of course," she replied, with a quizzical look as the color came to her cheeks. She could see that he was in deadly earnest about something.

The parlor was vacant, and from force of habit she went over to the sofa and sat down.

"Miss Mayer," he began, "do you think you know me well enough to answer a great big question?"

She only looked at him with wide-open eyes. She had never seen him look that way before. His smile was gone, and the even line of his thin lips showed that he was laboring under great excitement.

"I want to marry you," he said simply.

"Oh!" she gasped, and then she said it.

Yes, they really do say it sometimes, even if the funny men who write for papers treat it as a joke.

"But, Mr. Stevens, this is so sudden."

"I know it is sudden, and all that, and it isn't the way I had planned it at all, but I want to marry you, and I mean to have you. I had wanted you to feel that you knew me better before I asked you, but it is all changed now. I have to ask you now —this very morning—and I must have your answer."

"But father—what will he say?"

"Your father will approve. I give you my word for that."

The clock on the mantel ticked off the minutes, and soon the hired girl came in to dust the parlor and the little cupids in the wall-paper looked as though they were trying to turn back air-springs—because they knew it was all right.

Stevens grabbed his hat and ran out of the door. He hailed a passing taxicab, and told the chauffeur to drive like the deuce down Seventh Avenue until he told him to stop. He had followed old man Mayer many times before, and he knew his route as well as the bloodhound knows the trail of the fugitive slave.

Finally he came up to the old man plodding along with bent head and slow step on his way to the plant where he made the plates for counterfeit money, and risked his liberty for less return than he could have obtained from honest work. And all this because there was a twisted nerve or a skewed conscience string somewhere in his brain that kept him from seeing things as they are.

Stevens signaled to the driver, and as he drew up to the curb, he hailed the old man. At the sound of his name, he seemed to shrink up a little smaller and bow over a little more than ever.

He looked round quickly with that hunted look that Stevens had been studying for weeks. He had seen it many times before in other men, for he was a good detective, in fact, one of the best in the government Secret Service. That was the reason that he had been put on this case.

"Jump in, Mr. Mayer," he said, with an attempt at cheerfulness. "I'll give you a lift."

But the old man declined. He always walked, he said, for exercise. Stevens insisted, and finally the old man obeyed.

Here was a job for Stevens a little different from anything he had tackled. One thing was sure. The girl must never know. But suppose the old man should die of heart-failure when he told him, or suppose he should attempt some violence like shooting, and spoil it all.

The case had been a hard one to run down. For months the "counterfeit detector" had been warning the banks to look out for a new five-dollar bill, so perfect that the only way you could tell it was certain broken lines that it almost took a magnifying glass to see. Finally a Seventh Avenue bank found itself in possession of three of them at once, and the receiving-teller had remembered that Mrs. Laird had deposited them, and thus the trail ran right to her door. When Stevens paid his board just after old man Mayer, he always received as change two new five-dollar bills, until he had quite a collection of them.

For weeks Stevens had his men watching the place where they were made. It was a loft just off the avenue, with a sort of job-printing office as a blind. He knew that old man Mayer was only a tool, a sort of cog in the wheel. Just what his part was, he was not sure, but to arrest Mayer would not break it up. They would find another Mayer somewhere.

The round-up of that other gang in Long Island would make the rest nervous, and he felt that his quarry might slip through his fingers unless he acted that morning.

He turned to old man Mayer and said:

"Mr. Mayer, I've noticed that you haven't been looking very well lately. You ought to take an ocean trip over to Germany or somewhere. You need a change. And another thing. I want to marry your daughter. I love her and I can support her. I hope you won't refuse. Your boat leaves in an hour. We had better hurry down and engage passage for you."

The old man looked at him and wondered just what kind of a lunatic he really was.

"Oh, yes," went on Stevens, "I forgot to tell you that I am a detective down here looking up some counterfeiters. They have a place just round the corner. It will be raided at noon, and we shall get the whole gang, but one. He got away on an outbound steamer this morning. Smelled a rat, I guess."

The old man shrank up until his coat seemed several sizes too big. The veins came out on his forehead, and he dried up like a leaf in autumn. Then his clenched hands spoke a resolution that you could not read in his eyes, because they were full of mist. But Stevens could read men's thoughts in their hands as well as their eyes, and he was ready with a restraining grasp when the old man made an attempt to jump out of the taxicab.

"No! Don't do that," he said; "because then she would know. And neither of us want that. Do we? Will you go?"

The "yes" sounded more like a gasp.

"Here is some money for you."

He pressed a roll of bills into the old man's nerveless fingers.

"You will have time to write a note to your daughter before you sail and tell her that you have been called away on business —jewelry business, isn't it?—and that you had to sail immediately. That isn't very good, but it will do, and I will have to fix up the rest of the story. I will tell her that I met you, and that you explained it all to me."

Two days after, when the old gentleman with the newspaper was hemming and hawing about another big round-up of counterfeiters in New York, with the most dangerous set of plates found in years, Stevens and his bride were far out of the reach of newspapers, headed for Bermuda.

A girl in a steamer-chair adjoining theirs was reading a yellow-covered novel, with the title, "'Twixt Love and Duty," which made Stevens wonder if a man could walk two ways at once and still keep a straight course.

He decided that he could, anyway, because he was enough of a casuist to believe that "the end justifies the means."

A SUMMER PICTURE.

THE fields are turned to tawny green,
  And down the lane on either hand
  The tall mock-orange thickets stand,
And blooming elder bushes screen
Shy brooding wood doves, and between
Low lacing boughs the sheep are seen
  Across the pasture land.

Within the garden poppies spring,
  And tangled sweet-pea vines have spun
  A rosy tissued web, and run
Along the orchard fence, to cling
Beneath the trees where robins sing,
While to and fro the mowers swing
  Their scythes athwart the sun.

Evaleen Stein.

Four to Support

By Robert Carlton Brown

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

BILL BREWER, illustrator, and Bob Snarlton, "ad. writer," both Americans, and both engaged to be married, are in London. Fired by youthful enthusiasm for their ability to make a living, they cable to their *fiancées* to come over and be married, telling them that they will set up a double household. The girls agree to come. Before they arrive, Brewer injures his drawing hand very badly, so that he is thrown out of work. Then Snarlton runs foul of the law, and when the girls arrive they find Brewer very ill, and Snarlton out of a job and in shadow of jail.

When Snarlton's trial comes, to the utter consternation of every one he is found guilty and sentenced to three months' imprisonment. Added to this new misery comes a relapse on Brewer's part and the necessity for an operation. The five hundred dollars given for Snarlton's bail is happily returned to them—the only alleviating feature in their predicament. After a period of tension, Brewer goes through with the operation and comes out all right. The waif who caused them so much trouble comes to them and begs a home, and they, thinking that he may possibly be of some assistance to them, take him in.

The young people struggle against poverty until one of the girls conceives the idea of making little plaster images not unlike the American Billikin. So successful are they at this that they feel themselves on the highroad to fortune when a disagreeable individual, named Barker, appears and commands them under penalty of the law to stop work, saying that he has the patent on the figures. Snarlton is told of this and advises them not to agree to anything until they hear from him.

CHAPTER LXIV.

A STORMY INTERVIEW.

LILLIAN rushed home with a strange elation; she wondered what Bob knew concerning Baker and how he had managed to find it out.

She reached the house at a few minutes to four o'clock, and had hardly told the Brewers Bob's startling statement when a knock came at the door and Bill let in Mr. Baker.

His manner seemed quite changed since the night before. He came in smiling and cordial.

"Well," he said, "I hope we are not go-

*** This story began in The Cavalier for December, 1910.**

ing to have any trouble in arranging this little matter. I know that it must seem very strange to you that I am willing to drop the prosecution, if you will give me a written agreement to the effect that you give up all rights in the business to me; I say it seems strange, but it will save a great deal of money and trouble on both sides."

Brewer agreed with him, and made no offer to give their decision until Baker finally asked him outright what decision they had reached.

Then Brewer answered simply:

"We have talked the thing over well, and must tell you that we cannot consider signing such a paper. We regret that the thing will have to be fought out in court, but that seems to be the only road open to us. Feeling that you have no claim on us in any way, we have agreed to take our chances with the law."

A quick look of fear shot over Baker's face. He seemed stunned by this refusal, and gathered himself together only with great difficulty.

"You don't mean to say that you intend to try to protect your rights?" he cried, his face going very red. "You haven't any rights. I own the patent, and you will have absolutely no chance at all when the case comes to trial."

"I know our decision seems strange to you, but we have decided that it is the only thing we can do under the circumstances," answered Brewer coolly.

"You are making the mistake of your lives!" shouted the other.

"Possibly so," agreed Bill, "but we are going into the thing with our eyes open, and we are much obliged to you for your generous offer."

He was merely following Bob's advice to Lillian, and did not know what it might lead to. Yet, he was certain that Snarlton knew what he was talking about.

"You are fools!" cried Baker. "Here I give you the chance of a lifetime. Oh, I will make you suffer for this! I'll see that it costs you two hundred pounds to get out of the trouble your ignorance has brought upon you."

Brewer smiled at the rage into which the man was throwing himself. He easily argued from it that the fellow had some crooked motive. If he were honest, he certainly would not become so angry over a thing which would make but little difference to him.

"You'll have to excuse me now, Mr. Baker," said Brewer, when he saw that the man was fast losing control of himself. "I am very busy, and I am sure you have nothing more to say which will be of any interest to me."

"That's right. Be a fool if you want to," cried the other hotly. "I have given you a chance to save your skin and your money. If you want to be bull-headed and go against all reason—well, that is your own affair."

"I think I have heard enough from you," said Brewer sharply, passing through the room and opening the front door.

Baker paused for a moment; and then, with an angry gesture, jumped from his seat and started for the door which Brewer was holding open for him.

"You'll suffer for this!" he cried, as he turned on the bottom step and shook his fist at Brewer.

"I can take care of that all right," smiled Brewer in reply, as he closed the door and went back to join the girls.

The next morning Bob's letter came by the first post. Lillian opened it eagerly and read the following aloud to the Brewers:

DEAREST WIFE:

I must tell you about Baker. He is a fraud. He was my cellmate for three or four days while the prison was crowded.

During that time we became very well acquainted, and I learned that he is a soldier of fortune who spends all his time working out schemes to defraud the public.

He comes from Australia and is not known to the police here. He was locked up for only a few days on account of a fight he got into.

I don't think he'll have the nerve to appear against you in any court. But if he does, you can get a lawyer to look up his record in Australia and use that against him.

If he has a patent of any kind on such an image it is certainly something he has taken up very recently.

Don't let him bluff you. He explained fully to me that his business is that of taking advantage of other people's success.

Get a good lawyer to protect your rights at the trial. I don't think there will be any trouble.

I'm glad to hear that Bill is able to get about and manage things. It makes me feel a whole lot easier.

Love to the Brewers. BOB.

"What do you think of that?" cried Lillian, in an excited tone, as she finished reading.

"I think it looks rather bad for Baker,"

smiled the man. "But it certainly seems like good luck for us."

CHAPTER LXV.

A STRANGE SCENE IN COURT.

"I WONDER how Bob thinks we are going to get a lawyer?" said Lillian. "We haven't enough money to hire anybody. What extra cash we have must go for next month's rent. We certainly don't want to get into the same kind of trouble we had with the agent before."

"No," agreed Brewer, "but I think he meant that we would probably be able to secure a lawyer to take this case on the prospects there are in it."

"How do you mean?" asked his wife.

"Well, you know," was Brewer's reply, "there are a whole lot of young lawyers who need experience. We have a pretty good case; if we win we are sure of a very good business, and maybe we can get some young fellow to take the case on the chance that we will succeed. If we lose the case, he will still have gained in experience."

"It would be fine if we could get some one like that," agreed his wife. "Do you think you can?"

"I'm going out to find such a man right now," was Brewer's response. "I'm mighty glad the doctor says my arm is doing so well that I can go out of doors."

Brewer went at once, and the girls put in the time during his absence in wondering about the curious news contained in Bob's letter.

"If Bob is correct," said Lillian, "how does it happen that Baker did not remember his name? He certainly heard my name, and it is a very uncommon one. It's strange to me that he didn't immediately connect the two."

"That is a funny thing," agreed Mrs. Brewer. "But don't they go by numbers in jail?"

"Oh, yes!" said Lillian, somewhat relieved by this explanation. "I had forgotten that. Bob probably did not mention his name to the fellow who was his cellmate."

"It is certainly a very peculiar thing all the way through. I do hope that the lawyer will be able to find out something against this man Baker," said Anne Brewer.

"We'll have to wait and see. The whole thing has gone through so many changes and luck has been against us so steadily," replied Lillian, "that about all we can do is hope for the best."

Brewer returned home shortly after seven o'clock. He had been unable to find a lawyer willing to take their case, but hoped for better success the next day.

"The summons was for day after to-morrow at two o'clock at the West Kensington Court, wasn't it?" asked Brewer.

"Yes," Lillian replied. "I wonder if Baker will have the impudence to show up against us?"

"I suppose he will," was Brewer's answer. "You must remember he doesn't know that we have learned anything from Bob. He merely thinks we have considered it wise to wait and go through with the trial in the hope of winning."

Next morning quite early Brewer set out to continue his search for a young lawyer willing to take on the case for what chances there were in it.

Lillian had decided to spend that morning in writing to the dealers who had ordered images from them, and explaining that she would be unable to deliver the goods. But the sudden change matters had taken since Bob's letter made her think that it would be best to wait until after they appeared in court next day.

So she put off the work.

It was very hard for the two girls to put in the day with absolutely nothing to do. They had become so accustomed to the pleasant work of turning out the interesting idols that it was hard for them to sit still and do nothing.

Bill came in at noon with a jubilant smile on his face. He seemed very hopeful, and when questioned in regard to his luck, he replied:

"Yes, I managed to get a lawyer. He seems to be a very clever young fellow, and has promised to take up our case for us."

"Fine!" enthused Lillian. "Is he going to begin looking up Baker's record at once before we appear in court to-morrow?"

"No," answered Brewer. "He says that nothing can be done until we go to court to-morrow in answer to the summons and find out just what the charge is against us."

"Can't we do anything before we appear in court?" asked Lillian. "I'm so anxious to get started on the case. I think our chances are going to be good."

"I have quite a little faith myself since I talked to the lawyer this morning," replied

Brewer. "He says it's very hard for anybody to obtain a conviction against a person who has infringed a patent for only two weeks or so. He is going to look up Baker's patents some time to-morrow."

None of them had taken much notice of Jimmie during these last exciting days. But he had been round most of the time with his ears and eyes open, to say nothing of his mouth. He had heard the various discussions, and seemed to want to learn all the details.

That afternoon he put a question which electrified the whole group.

"Does that crook think he's going to prove anything against you?" asked Jimmie.

"Crook?" smiled Brewer. "How do you know that, Jimmie?"

"Oh, I've seen him before. He's one of the guys what hangs 'round Leicester Square lookin' for tourists and other people with more money than sense."

They questioned him closely to find out just how much he knew about Baker. The boy had no facts; but assured them that he had often seen the man, and knew him to be a suspicious character.

They soon forgot all about Jimmie's volunteered remarks in contemplation of the trial which was to take place on the following day.

The next morning, as soon as they had breakfasted, they began to prepare to go to the West Kensington court.

At two o'clock they met their lawyer there, an energetic young fellow who seemed to be all business.

They took places in the part where the public were allowed to sit, and waited for their names to be called. All of them were on the outlook for Baker, but he was nowhere to be seen.

They waited for almost an hour after the appointed time and, to their great surprise, the judge did not call their names.

At length Brewer's lawyer grew anxious, and stepped up to the front, where he asked a clerk a few questions. Then he returned to the awed little party with a puzzled look on his face.

"What is the matter?" queried Brewer.

"I can't understand it at all," was the lawyer's reply. "It's the strangest thing I have ever run up against. You are sure that the summons read to you said at two o'clock this afternoon?"

"Absolutely sure," replied Brewer.

"But the clerk at the desk says that no people bearing your names have been summoned," replied the lawyer.

CHAPTER LXVI.

A STRANGE MISTAKE.

"HOW very strange!" cried Bill Brewer. "Can it be that he has withdrawn his case?"

"No. I asked about that, and they say they have never heard of this case at all," was the reply.

"What shall we do, then?"

"We will go out and talk it over. There is no use waiting here," replied the lawyer. "They don't want you people for anything."

So the dazed little party filed out of the stuffy court-room and went at once to the lawyer's chambers. Before they had had an opportunity to talk over this surprise the lawyer's clerk entered with a folded paper, which he handed to his employer.

"What is this?" he asked the clerk.

"It's a report on that Baker patent case you asked me to look into this afternoon, sir," replied the clerk.

"Oh, this is just in time!" said the lawyer, looking around at the anxious faces of Mrs. Snarlton and the Brewers.

He glanced through the report, and then looked up at them with a smile.

"I find," he said, "that Mr. Baker took out the patent he was talking about just the day before yesterday. That's the day he went to see you people about your image, isn't it?"

"Yes," answered Brewer.

"Then he must be a rare scoundrel. The patent here is taken out on exactly the same image that you made. He must have learned that it had not been patented, and took advantage of that fact to try and get control of it."

"It seems very strange that anybody would have had the nerve to do such a bold thing," said Brewer.

"Fellows of that kind have to be bold to make a living," the other assured him.

"I can readily see, though, how we might have been taken in by him," went on the other. "If Lillian hadn't noticed that the ink was over a day old on the agreement he wanted us to sign, we would probably have signed it to get out of the trouble of going to court and standing suit for it all."

"Yes, he certainly had a good hold on you," agreed the lawyer.

"But how could he get the policemen to summons us?" queried Lillian. "It doesn't seem that he would be able to bribe two policemen to do such a thing as long as they say there was no record of the summonses at court."

"That's the easiest part of it all, my dear young lady," answered the advocate. "He merely got two of his confederates to impersonate policemen to help out his little game."

"But that is a serious thing to do, isn't it?" queried the girl.

"It certainly is," agreed the lawyer. "When we catch the rogue we can certainly make him suffer a heavy penalty for this game he has been playing."

"Then you think we can get hold of him?" asked Brewer.

"Well, I can't be certain of it, of course; but it looks that way. He probably hasn't very much money, and won't be liable to get out of the country. He probably thinks you will be so happy in finding that it was all a game that you won't try to find him. It was certainly lucky that you weren't scared into a compromise with him. If you had signed the papers, there would be nothing to save you."

"It was a great piece of luck," said Mrs. Brewer enthusiastically.

"Am I to understand that we are free to go on making these images now?" Brewer asked the lawyer.

"I see no reason why not," replied the lawyer. "The patent has only been applied for. If it is granted, Baker will have to appear to pay for it. When he appears we will simply have him arrested, show that the rights belong to you, and have him jailed. It's very simple."

"If we can get hold of him," corrected Brewer.

"I will see to that for you if you wish," was the lawyer's response.

"I'm afraid we can't afford to hire detectives. We've got the business back now, and that is the main point," said Brewer.

"As you wish," replied the lawyer. "But I hope the man will be brought to justice. It was certainly a very clever idea. It is so plain.

"He evidently was attracted by the success of your image and found out in some way that you were Americans, and had just started it. That gave him the notion that you might have failed to take out a patent, so he went around that afternoon, after drawing up an agreement to get the rights to the business.

"When he found that his guess was correct he simply got a couple of his confederates to impersonate officers and tried to scare you into giving up your rights."

"He nearly succeeded, too," said Brewer, as he thought the whole thing over. "The girls were so frightened at being summoned that they or I would have given anything in our power to save them from going to court."

"He evidently had all that figured out beforehand. He must be a shrewd fellow," replied the lawyer.

"But I can't understand how he got news that we were going to fight the case and was scared away?" put in Brewer.

"That's simple," replied the advocate. "As soon as he found that you would not sign the agreement he knew there was some hitch in his plan, and as he knew that the summons had been bogus, he merely gave up the whole thing."

"Yes, that's doubtless the solution. It's lucky Bob was in the same cell with him at prison," replied Brewer.

"That's the only thing that saved you from losing a very valuable business," was the lawyer's reply.

CHAPTER LXVII.

BACK TO PROSPERITY.

"THEN it was lucky after all that Bob went to jail," enthused Lillian.

"Well, it worked out all right in this case at least," Brewer smiled in reply.

"If it hadn't been for that we should certainly be up against it," said Lillian.

"As there's nothing left to do, let's get back to the house and begin work again," suggested Brewer. "We'll have to hire back those four men and start things all over again."

"It is certainly fine that I didn't write those letters to the dealers telling them that we couldn't fill their orders," answered Lillian. "Now we've got a chance to send word to them that we have been necessarily delayed and that we'll send out the stuff as soon as possible. If we get several new people to work on the images, we can do the thing in a big hurry without much trouble."

"I guess that's the best idea," agreed Brewer.

They left the lawyer and went home at once to make arrangements for picking up the work where they had dropped it in such a rush a short time before.

It was a great relief for all of them to plunge back into the business they had learned to like so well.

The first thing Lillian did on arriving home was to scratch a note to Bob telling him how the whole thing had come out.

Then she sent Mrs. Brewer round to console the dealers, and they started to work in earnest. Brewer superintended the men, and they turned out a surprising amount of work.

Dr. Hill came in and he was quite enthusiastic over the result. He had thought all along that there must be something crooked in Baker's actions, but had had no time to waste on the case.

Jimmie rushed round like a new boy. Everything seemed to be different now. They had new life and were again happy and contented.

That night, when they stopped work late, Mrs. Snarlton remarked to Brewer:

"Well, one good thing has come out of all this, we will have a patent on the little image now, so that nobody can trouble us any more."

"That certainly is a good feature," replied Brewer. "We surely wouldn't have thought of taking out a patent if it hadn't been for our friend Baker."

"Friend is a funny name to call him by," smiled Lillian. "But I guess he was that, in a way."

"Are you going to have the fellow pinched?" asked Jimmie.

"If we can ever get a hold of him," replied Brewer.

"Maybe I can help you out in that," was Jimmie's reply.

"How can you do anything to help us, Jimmie?" asked Brewer.

"I know the face of that guy, and if I ever see him again I'll follow him close until I can get a bobby to pinch him."

There was a general laugh at this earnest offer on the part of the urchin. They could not see just exactly how he could be helpful in any way, but they were very glad to see the spirit that he showed by making the offer.

For a week things went on in quite the same way. They worked day and night on the plaster images, and managed to get together quite a little money.

The introduction of the American Billikin seemed to make but very little difference in their business. They being the first in the field, gave them an undoubted advantage.

"I wish Bob could get out of jail," said Lillian, as she returned from visiting him one day. "He's got some splendid ideas on how to make money out of our image in an advertising way."

"How much longer has he got to stay in jail?" asked Mrs. Brewer.

"Only a little more than six weeks," was Lillian's reply.

"By the time he gets out we will be doing so well that he won't have to go back to the advertising game in order to make a living," answered Brewer. "I think we will have quite enough for all of us to do in turning out these plaster idols."

"I wonder when that Mr. Reynolds will be back?"

"The one who went to Cape Town?" asked Anne Brewer.

"Yes, the advertising man who loaned Bob one hundred dollars to help out on the bail. It certainly is a shame that we had to spend all that bail money on my operation."

"Didn't Bob say that Reynolds would be gone for nearly two months?" asked Mrs. Snarlton.

"I believe that was the length of time," was Brewer's reply. "That makes it only a week or two before he will be back."

"Then we shall have to pay him the one hundred dollars that Bob borrowed," sighed Lillian. "It does seem a shame that always just as we are getting a little money ahead, something has to happen to use up our surplus and make us scratch for more."

Another week rolled by, and they were still doing an excellent business. A letter came from Hapgood, in New York City, telling them about his father's death and how it had broken up the whole family.

The letter served to remind them that twenty dollars was still due him, which Bob had borrowed. Lillian sent a money-order for that amount, paid the next month's rent, and then found that they had only fifty dollars left.

While they had been making a great deal of money, their expenses were high, and they had a big doctor's bill which they were getting rid of in instalments.

"If that man Reynolds comes home, I hope he doesn't find us," said Lillian. "I

don't know how we could ever pay him that one hundred dollars."

"Well, don't worry about it until the time comes," advised Brewer.

That very afternoon a taxicab rushed up to their house and a well-dressed gentleman jumped out. Lillian saw him from the front window and sent Jimmie to the door.

She was strangely agitated by this sudden arrival of a stranger. What could his business be?

A moment later Jimmie entered the room in a flutter of excitement.

"What does he want?" asked Lillian, her voice faint with suppressed excitement.

"It's something very important," replied the boy, with an anxious look on his face.

"He wants to see you. He says he can't wait but a minute, and you must see him, because his business is of a highly important nature; them's the words he used."

CHAPTER LXVIII.

GREAT EXCITEMENT.

LILLIAN went at once, in answer to Jimmie's summons, to find out who the stranger was and what he wanted.

As she entered the room the man jumped to his feet and exclaimed:

"I am Mr. Reynolds. Perhaps you have heard your husband speak of me."

"Oh, yes, indeed," replied Lillian, going faint as she thought of the one hundred dollars which they owed him, and realizing that he must have called to collect that.

"I was so pained to learn that your husband was convicted on that foolish charge and sent to jail," he began abruptly. "If I hadn't been called away in such a horrible hurry to Africa I should have seen to it that he had a good lawyer to defend him, and the chances are he would have been free."

"I went to his trial," said Lillian, "and I am sure that he would have been able to get out if he could have afforded a good lawyer."

"Well, that matter is closed now," said Mr. Reynolds. "He is already in jail, and the only thing to do is to see if we can't get him out at once."

"Oh, do you think there is any chance to do that?" cried Lillian, in an excited tone.

She was so surprised and relieved to find that he had said nothing about the money due him, and could hardly believe her ears when he offered to help.

"I have absolute faith in your husband, Mrs. Snarlton," he replied. "I was so sorry that I couldn't be here to help him out, but business makes abrupt demands on a person's time. I have, however, some influence, and I am more than anxious to exert it in behalf of your husband."

"It is splendid of you to suggest such a thing," replied Lillian. "But I don't think he has any chance to get out. You know how hard it has been for all of us to live down the thought that he is in jail."

"It must have been," replied the other. "I shall do all I can at once to get him out. He still has a little over a month to serve, and it certainly is a shame to see a healthy, capable man like Mr. Snarlton cooped up in such a horrible place as Holloway Jail. Depend upon it, Mrs. Snarlton, I shall do my best to have him freed at once."

In a very short time the conversation drifted to their remarkable success with the plaster images. Mr. Reynolds knew all about them, and was wonderfully enthusiastic over the whole idea.

"It's a great scheme," he said. "If you people had capital enough I think there would be a fortune in it for you. If Mr. Snarlton were only out of jail, I am sure he would find some way to get free advertising and make a big success of the scheme."

It was very hard for Lillian to hear him continually refer in such a hopeful way to Bob's release, but now that the thought had come to her she could consider nothing else.

In a very short time Mr. Reynolds took his leave, after hearing the story of the man Baker, who had tried to get possession of the idea. He told Lillian that he was going directly to the jail to see Bob, and assured her that she would have some cheerful news from him before a great while.

As soon as he had gone Lillian told the news to the Brewers with breathless excitement. They had looked forward to Mr. Reynolds's home-coming with dread; now it had turned to a blessing.

"I think our luck has changed for good," said Lillian. "Everything seems to be coming out all right."

"They say it always does come to him who waits," replied Brewer. "And we have certainly waited long enough, don't you think?"

They readily agreed with Bill. Then

they spent the remainder of the evening in talking over the possibilities of what Reynolds might do for them, and figuring on the fortune that might be made if they could raise enough money to properly push the images.

Next morning Mr. Reynolds called quite early and asked again for Lillian. She was breathless with excitement as she went down to him. He answered the great question in her eyes the moment she entered the room.

"No," he said, "I was unable to do anything at the jail yesterday. But I haven't given up hope yet. I had a long talk with your husband and learned that he has been a model prisoner. That will certainly help if we have any chance to free him."

"Did Bob think there was a possibility of being let out?" asked Mrs. Snarlton anxiously.

"No, naturally he has such a fear of the law that he sees no chance of anything," was Mr. Reynolds's reply. "But don't worry. I am going this afternoon to see a city official I think will be able to help us."

"It would certainly be great," replied Lillian. "I think he has had enough punishment already."

"And I'm sure of it," answered the other. "But that wasn't what I came to see you about this morning. Last evening I went to see the man who defended you in your case with Baker which didn't come off. He seems to think the crook is still in the city, and that it wouldn't be hard work to get hold of him if detectives were set on his trail."

"But what good would it do to prosecute the man now?" asked Lillian. "It seems like only a waste of money. We have our rights, and that is all that is really necessary."

"But that is just the point," Reynolds told her. "You see, you haven't your rights. He has put in his application for a patent, and if it is granted, you will have hard work in proving that it should have been granted to you.

"The best thing to do is to get hold of the fellow and prosecute him. Then there will be no doubt about the patent right. This business is going to be bigger than you people had any idea of, and it's best to take all possible precautions."

"Then what would you advise us to do?" asked Lillian.

"I think the very best thing would be to spend a little money on detectives," replied Reynolds.

"But we haven't enough for that," answered Lillian quickly.

"No, possibly not now. But it won't be very long before you will have, when this business gets under way in the proper manner. I would gladly advance any amount needed for this purpose."

"But we already owe you money, Mr. Reynolds," said Lillian. "I am sure Bob would not like it at all to have us borrow any more."

"Then I will do it for myself," replied the other. "I hate to see anybody who isn't cautious enough to protect his own interests."

"Well, I don't know what to say," answered Lillian, with a puzzled expression.

"The best thing you can do is just leave the whole matter in my hands," replied Mr. Reynolds. "If your husband owes me anything at the end of it all I am sure I can easily arrange it with him."

"It is awfully good of you," answered Lillian, not knowing what else to say.

"Please don't say anything about it," Reynolds replied, taking up his hat and leaving at once.

CHAPTER LXIX.

JIMMIE MAKES A DISCOVERY.

AFTER Mr. Reynolds had gone, Lillian went in to talk things over with the Brewers, who were busily engaged in turning out the plaster images.

"I hope he does get hold of that fellow Baker," said Brewer. "I hadn't thought before how nice it would be to make sure of the patent on this image. I'm getting a little more confidence in it every day."

"Mr. Reynolds seems to think that it will grow into a very large concern if we can get some capital to back it," replied Lillian.

"Gee, I hope Bob will get out of jail before long," said Brewer. "You see, I am nothing but a commercial artist, and he has got ten times as much head for business as I will ever have."

"He seems to be figuring out advertising schemes all the time he is in jail," smiled Lillian. "I don't know but it was a good thing, after all, that he was locked up."

"Yes," put in Mrs. Brewer. "Old Bunyan wrote 'Pilgrim's Progress' in a cell.

There certainly have been great things done by men locked up."

"And Napoleon invented his great solitaire game of cards while he was penned up," added Brewer. "I hope Bob follows in the footsteps of these illustrious people and gets hold of some idea that can be turned into coin of the realm."

"I know a man that cut out a beautiful ship with his pocket-knife while he was in the work'ouse, too," put in Jimmie.

His remark was rather explosive, and they all turned to him with a laugh.

"Who was he?" asked Brewer.

"My governor," explained the boy, with a grin.

This digression put an end to the conversation. Dr. Hill came in shortly and made his daily examination of Brewer's arm.

"You are getting along finely," he said. "I shouldn't wonder a bit if you'd be out of the great trouble you've had inside of a week or two. It has been far more serious than I have let you know."

"Well, that's encouraging," replied Brewer. "When a man is well, or getting well, he always likes to think he has been through a more serious siege than anybody else."

"It's human nature," smiled the doctor. "More of us are conceited than rheumatic."

"I'm neither," replied Brewer.

Later in the day Lillian received a telephone message from Mr. Reynolds saying that his interview with the powerful city official had been fairly satisfactory, but that he had not been able to get any definite answer as yet.

"That sounds like good news," commented Brewer.

"He also told me that he had put detectives on the trail of Baker," replied Lillian.

"That was a wise thing to do. Gee, won't it be great if everything comes out all right after all?"

Anne Brewer had been busier than any of them during the past weeks. She had done all the outside work, taken all the orders, and delivered the goods. Lillian and Brewer remained at home to fill the orders that poured in upon them.

Three days passed after Mr. Reynolds's second visit before he came again. He explained to them that business had kept him away, but that he had not neglected trying to get Bob out of jail, and had received reports from the detectives who were looking for Baker.

"Have they found any track of him at all?" asked Brewer.

"Absolutely none," answered Mr. Reynolds. "I am afraid that the man has left the city."

"What will that mean to us?" asked Lillian.

"It will only mean a great and unnecessary expense in proving to the people at the patent-office that you really own the rights to the image."

"I certainly hope they discover something then," was the young fellow's reply.

The conversation suddenly switched to Bob's case, and Mr. Reynolds told them he had great hopes of getting the young fellow out.

"It's a shame to keep a man with his brains in jail," explained Mr. Reynolds. "We had a long talk the other day about the prospects of this business. He had some very good ideas concerning it, and as soon as he gets out I hope it will be placed on a larger and more profitable basis."

"But we are clearing almost a hundred dollars a week on it now," answered Brewer.

"Mr. Brewer," said the other with a laugh, "the trouble with you is that you are a commercial artist and can't see the possibilities in things."

"I know it," admitted Bill, "but how much do you figure we should make out of this business?"

"If you get a little capital, so you can turn the things out in larger numbers, you ought to be able to make over a thousand dollars a week, instead of a mere hundred."

They were all greatly surprised at this statement, and could hardly grasp the immensity of it.

Having talked everything over, Mr. Reynolds left them with the remark that he was going down to try once more to have Bob released.

Two days passed with no news from him. Finally Brewer called him up and asked if there was anything new.

"No," answered Mr. Reynolds. "Snarlton's discharge from jail is still hanging fire. We haven't heard anything about Baker either."

"How much are the detectives costing us?" asked Brewer, for that had been the subject for many a conversation among the people at the West Kensington house.

"About twenty dollars a day in your money," answered Mr. Reynolds.

"As much as that?" cried Brewer.

"Yes; I have had five of them working on the case. But they find it is quite hopeless, and I guess there is no need of continuing the expense. Of course, it would save a great deal of money if this man Baker could be caught."

"But we'll be bankrupt at that rate," cried Brewer. "I hope you will call them off at once."

"I had about reached that decision myself," answered the other. "I'm sorry we can't get hold of Baker, because it would have saved about five hundred dollars or more in law fees to guarantee the patent to you people."

The girls were greatly alarmed when Brewer explained to them that they had been paying twenty dollars a day for detectives. They had no fault to find with Reynolds for having taken this course, because they knew that he had their best interests at heart, but they were greatly worried to find this new bill which would have to be met.

As the trio were sitting at dinner that night somebody suddenly asked what had become of Jimmie. He had not been round the house all that afternoon. Anne had sent him out to deliver an order at noon and he should have been back in at least two hours.

While they were worrying over what had become of him the door to the dining-room burst open and Jimmie appeared with a flushed face and a very excitable manner.

"What's the matter with you?" cried Brewer.

"Come out here quick!" cried Jimmie. "I have got something to show you. I've got something to tell you, too."

Jimmie addressed all of them, and they could not understand his mysterious manner, but nevertheless they jumped up from the table and followed him quickly through the door, wondering what could have happened to throw him into such an excited condition.

CHAPTER LXX.

A BIG PIECE OF LUCK.

THEY followed Jimmie into the street. There appeared suddenly from the shadows two policemen.

"What's all this about?" asked Brewer.

"The boy says he has seen a man that is wanted," replied one of the officers, touching his helmet to Brewer. "We thought he was fooling, but he said that you would assure us, sir, that it was the right man. We couldn't take the boy's word for it, sir."

"Why didn't you bring the officers into the house?" Brewer asked Jimmie.

"I didn't want to lose time," replied the young fellow. "I just saw Baker up in Hammersmith."

"Baker!" all three of them chorused.

"Yes," he answered, with a grin.

"Are you sure?" cried Lillian, putting her hand on his shoulder.

"There's no doubt of it," answered the boy. "He's got a poor disguise on. But I could see through that all right."

"Why did you leave him? Why didn't you follow him until he got to a place where you could find him again?" cried Brewer.

The boy smiled. They had all noted before that Jimmie had wisdom beyond his years.

"I guess there won't be no trouble findin' him," smiled the lad. "He's dead drunk on gin in a public house out there. I got two men lookin' after him for me. I said he was my governor, an' I give 'em a tanner apiece to watch after him till I could get somebody to take him home.

"Then I tried to get a bobby there to pinch him, but nobody believed my story till I struck these here two, an' they come along to see if I told the truth."

It was a rather long speech for Jimmie, and he got it out as though it were all in one breath.

"Quick!" cried Brewer, when the boy had finished. "You girls go back in the house and wait, and we'll go over to Hammersmith to find Baker. There's no time to be lost now."

An empty taxicab was going by just at that moment; Brewer hailed it, and got in with the two officers and Jimmie. At the boy's directions the driver took them to the public house where Jimmie had left Baker.

They found him still there, and Brewer identified him beyond a doubt, in spite of the fact that he had attempted to disguise himself.

The officers did their duty, and Brewer returned home with Jimmie in a jubilant frame of mind.

If it had been possible for Jimmie to become spoiled he would have been roy-

ally spoiled that night, for the girls petted him and raved over him as though he were the most wonderful youth the world had ever known. But Jimmie did not take kindly to their praise, and slunk away as soon as possible in order to avoid it.

It seemed as though everything happened at once, for late that night Mr. Reynolds dashed up to the door in a motor and told them the great good news that he had finally succeeded in getting Bob out of jail.

"When will he be home?" cried Lillian, beside herself with happiness.

"This very night," answered Reynolds. "I was going to wait and let him surprise you himself, but I just couldn't do it. I wanted to have a little bit of the honor myself."

They waited for Bob in such great expectancy that it seemed almost anxiety.

When he appeared suddenly in the hall, having let himself in with his own latch-key, there was a great scene. Everybody talked at once, and poor Bob could only stand with his arm round Lillian, and beam with happiness at such a joyful home-coming.

As soon as they could tell him anything they explained how Jimmie had captured Baker.

Then it was necessary to search the house for the boy in order that Bob, too, could thank him for the great service he had rendered.

When they finally found him they were forced to hold the lad and make him listen to their praises, for he continually tried to slip away.

"Jimmie," said Snarlton slowly and impressively, "you are the greatest little boy that ever happened. You're adopted in this family from this moment on.

"You caused all the trouble that we got into at first. Of course, it wasn't your fault at all, and we don't hold you responsible; but we do hold you responsible for having done your best to help us out. You've proved yourself to-night and you're adopted, understand?"

The boy gave him a sheepish grin and nodded his head. Then he tried again to break away from them.

"We'll have to send him to school," suggested Brewer. "A boy like Jimmie ought to have an education. He's a born detective. I wouldn't at all wonder if he'd even become greater than *Sherlock Holmes* himself."

They had a very hilarious evening. It was the first time they had felt absolutely free and in danger of nothing.

But all good things must come to an end, and, after a jolly little supper in celebration of the eventful day, the party broke up, and they all went to bed.

CHAPTER LXXI.

SUCCESS AT LAST.

BREWER communicated with his lawyer at once concerning the capture of Baker. He came right over and took charge of the case. It was finished up in three days.

Baker's Australian record was brought up against him. He was accused of hiring the men to impersonate officers and trying to get money under false pretenses. His record and Brewer's lawyer secured for him a long sentence.

Snarlton immediately cabled the fact that he had been released from jail to his friend Hapgood, in New York.

On the day of the Baker trial Snarlton received a reply from his friend congratulating them and wishing them all possible success now that their troubles were over.

A week later the doctor paid his final visit to Brewer in his professional capacity. But he had been so good to the young people that they always remained friends. They were able to pay him every cent due even before Baker's trial came off.

He said that Brewer's arm was all right, so that he could return to his art work as soon as he wished. But there was too much business to be done on the images, and they could not spare him.

Reynolds and Snarlton had worked hard for two weeks in organizing a company with good capital to turn out the images. Bob's ideas concerning the advertising possibilities of the thing were so good that within a month they had worked up a wonderfully good business, and were employing thirty men to turn out the idols.

The thing had an almost unheard-of success, and the Brewers and Snarltons could never get over the fact that the idea would never have occurred if they had not found so much trouble.

As the business steadily increased they began to feel that their bad luck at the start had been almost providential.

They made up with a vengeance all the

good times they had lost, and there was hardly a day that they didn't plan an entertainment of some sort.

In the course of six months the image business grew to such an extent that it could be handled very easily and without the girls doing any work. Brewer was getting impatient to get back to his art work. But Snarlton was quite contented with managing the image business and working out new advertising ideas in connection with it.

One day, just eight months after Snarlton had been released from jail through the kind offices of his friend, he came home from work with a new light in his eyes.

"The thing is such an established success now that I think we can all afford to take a vacation. It can run itself for a while. Besides, Reynolds will be here to see that everything runs all right.

"I've got an idea," he said. "Let's all take a trip somewhere. The main idea in coming over here was to see more of the world."

"We haven't had a honeymoon yet," suggested Lillian, with a smile.

"That's right. We won't be cheated out of our heritage," answered Mrs. Brewer.

"Where shall we go?" asked Bob.

"How about Venice?" suggested Brewer. "That always had a very romantic sound to me."

"It's just the place for a honeymoon," agreed Lillian.

They all seemed quite enthusiastic over the suggestion, and it was adopted at once.

"I'll be rather glad to get out of this old house," said Brewer. "We won't come back to it again, will we?"

They had stayed in the West Kensington house because they had been too busy to look up a new place.

"No," answered Snarlton, "when we come home we won't have such a large place. There's too much running up and down stairs to suit me. We'll get one of those self-contained flats on a bold corner that I saw advertised in a paper the other day."

"What a funny advertisement," cried Lillian.

"Everything's funny in this blooming country," replied Snarlton. "As soon as we have our honeymoon and get the business in shape we'll move back to America."

"That's a good idea," said Mrs. Brewer.

"Then we'll build one of these cute little English houses, banked with flowers, somewhere in New York."

"And think up a fancy name for the place, as they do in England," suggested Brewer. "We'll call it Meadow View if there isn't a meadow anywhere around, or Ivy Lodge, if there isn't a spear of ivy on the place. That's the way they pick their names for homes in England, I've noticed."

They talked the thing over at great length in a playful manner, and then somebody suggested:

"But what will we do with Jimmie while we are gone on our honeymoon?"

"Take him along," said Snarlton.

"What for?" asked Brewer.

"As a combination valet and ladies' maid. Jimmie can always be useful. It's a shame he doesn't take to schooling. I'd hoped to make a gentleman out of that lad," he spoke with the pained feeling of a disappointed father.

"I'm afraid Jimmie's parents had something to do with that," replied Lillian. "He's had too many generations of dullards in his family ever to make a scholar. But he'll be a good servant. When we get rich we'll have to make him our coachman."

"We will not," her husband corrected her. "Jimmie got us into all our trouble and brought us out into the greatest luck we have ever known. He deserves something more than that. He'll retire on a pension when he's thirty."

They suggested the honeymoon to Jimmie, but it did not appeal to him. He hated to leave London. It seemed to be a sort of charge that he had imposed on himself. The care and well-being of the city rested with him.

So when the little party got ready to start on their honeymoon they looked round for Jimmie, and found that he had disappeared.

He left in his place the following note:

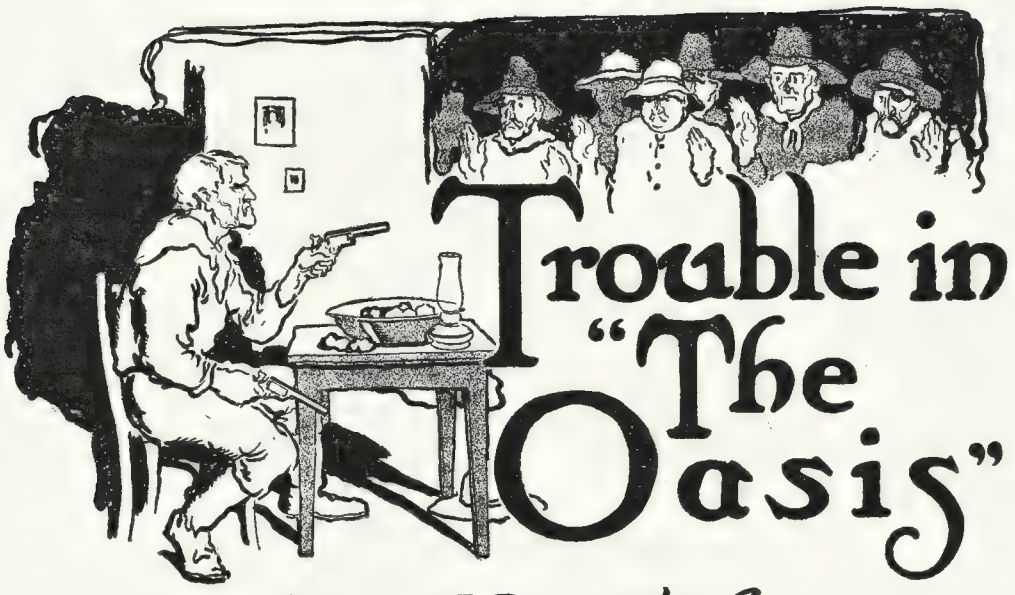
DEER PEEPLE:

I got an ejicated gent to write this for me for to say that I got to stay in London. The king needs me. I don't want to go along on no honeymoon as Cuppid. They might take me for the living example of the funny immage what you made.

I'm sorry. Good-buy and good-luck,

JIMMIE.

(The end.)



Trouble in "The Oasis"

By L. K. Devendorf

FOR six months Silver Miller had been marshal of Sand City.

From a lurid, wide-open cow-town, it had developed into a practically sane, self-restrained community. High-strung punchers, borax teamsters, and the riff-raff from the construction camp no longer looked forward to the regular pay-day jamboree within its confines.

It had taken four months of physical effort, with an occasional addition to the little plot on the sand-hill to perfect this condition.

Once they understood him, and he saw that those left were apparently contented to lop off the necks of bottles, puncture tin cans, and by a somewhat broader interpretation of his edict, to shoot out the lights in The Oasis at least once a week; he began to feel the pride that naturally comes to one who has almost accomplished the impossible.

But now Sand City had experienced a setback, and as Miller stood in the darkened room, back of the express company's shack, his hand upon the door-latch, a feeling of disappointment came over him.

Upon the narrow, blanketed cot lay Edwards, the express agent, dead. They had found him a half-hour before in the main room, a bullet-hole in the pocket of his gray flannel shirt.

More than this no one knew.

And so he stood there, sullen, unstrung, in the dark, thinking; then he opened the door and stepped into the front room.

The crowd had thinned down to a half-dozen or more; and as he closed the door behind him, two men, strangers, moved toward him.

"You're marshal here, I understand," one said. "I'm from the construction camp above here, on the new spur to Silver City. We had advices yesterday that the money to meet the pay-roll was coming in to-night, on the stage. This man and myself came down after it. If you will look at the agent's register, there on the desk, you'll see that he had received it, and must have had the package in his hand when this happened.

"It's the last entry in the book, and he hadn't finished recording the number of the package, in the last column here, as you will see," said the man, locating the place with his finger.

Miller examined the register.

In the last column were the figures "300"—a small mark next to the last cipher seemed to indicate another figure had been started, possibly a 5, but not completed.

"Um," he muttered. "That looks reasonable," as he studied the book for a mo-

ment. "I guess that's about all here to-night, boys," he said, turning to them. "We'll close up and see what can be done. Benny, you and Dusty stay here until some one from the company comes out."

So persistent and so effectual had been the combing process of Miller, that the enterprising hold-up men, the killers, and the general camp scum, had avoided the country in which Sand City shone as the metropolis. But now, as he walked up the narrow, sand-covered lane between the shacks, he felt that some one was testing the reality of the condition. And as the lights of The Oasis caught his eye, he realized that Sand City had faltered, and that a relapse might be due.

He stepped upon the little platform of boards before The Oasis, and then walked into the one room that served as bar, dance-hall, and gambling-room.

Frisco, the owner of the faro layout, was coming down the stairs which led to the gallery of boxes overhanging the farther end of the place. He was half-dragging, half pushing Santi, Riordin's Mexican boy, down the stairs. At every step Santi took a new hold on the rail, but the hold on the neck of the checkered shirt was stronger, and he finally landed at the bottom of the stairs.

Swinging the boy round in front, Frisco brutally kicked the small figure from him.

"There, you yellow-faced—" but the words seemed to halt on his lips.

A man leaped from the low bench along the rough timber-studded wall, drew his gun from his hip with a motion so peculiar, so clumsy, that it seemed to Miller to be almost fatal; then, leaning slightly, he brought the gun forward with a quick upward jerk, and slammed the long, blue barrel hard across the side of Frisco's face.

During the interval in which Frisco's knees bent beneath him and his crumpling like a green hide to the floor, Miller's mind quickly coupled the peculiar draw and blow with the yellow hair and the slender figure—and he recognized the man.

"Don't draw that gun," said the stranger, as the gambler's hand instinctively fumbled the breast of his coat, "or I'll plug you—you calf-killer!"

"Stiddy—stiddy!" yelled Miller, throwing his two hundred and eighty pounds of beef between the two men, pressing down the gun that covered the prostrate man.

"Keep back, men—keep back!" he said to the crowd that surged forward. "No harm done. I'll take care of this."

Frisco slowly rose from the floor.

"I'll get you for that," he muttered, as he made his way toward the table in his corner of the room. The stranger started to reply, hesitated, then turned away.

As he turned, Miller thought he detected a flash of recognition in the blue eyes—a slight nod—but even that discounted; the tawny hair, the blue eyes, the smooth face, the clumsy, though second-splitting draw, belonged to only one man—Quick Mitchell.

The bar had quickly regained its momentary loss of prestige, the piano had started its clang almost on the same note that Schriner had left slighted for the shelter its frame afforded.

"Back out—slow," said Miller to the man, as he passed him. "I'll follow you. I want to talk to you."

He watched him mingle with the stream of punchers and teamsters that drifted in. When close to the door he stepped quickly to his side, and they went out together.

"Now, then," said Miller, "into the middle of the street—where it's dark. You're purty thin, but Frisco peels a keen eye, and he ain't above puttin' a hunk in between your shoulders — 'specially after your wipin' him—like you would a Chinaman."

"What's the game?" asked the man.

"Oh — well, you're goin' over to my place, where we can set down and talk a bit," replied Miller, somewhat surprised at the apparent lack of desire to comment on the incident.

They walked up the street in silence, until Miller stopped at a door and pushed it open.

"You strike a match," he said. "Now, then," as the match flared, "you go in and light the lamp—straight ahead of you—on the table."

The man walked into the room—holding the lighted match above his head. When he had found the lamp and lighted it, he turned to Miller.

"There — now set down," said Miller, "on the other side of the table. I don't mean no offense, but this town's full of strangers to-day—and accidents; and you and me has got to git acquainted all over again, Mitchell."

The name had brought no start, no denial; and the opening he intentionally left

for a show of hostility was quickly passed by the other.

"All right, Sliver, I understand; fire away. What's crawled into your bunk?" he asked, settling himself in the chair.

"There, that sounds sensible like," said Miller, relieved. "I thought maybe I'd have to arger with you—but between you and me, boy, there ain't no use of cuttin' the hide in small pieces. To begin with, I ain't goin' back of stage-time to-night.

"Grant County don't want you for anything that I know of—so you can talk free and easy like with me. Now, in the first place, where was you to-night when Edwards was done for—down in the express office?" continued Miller, drawing nearer the table, and folding his arms across the top.

Mitchell pushed away a trifle and tipped back on the legs of the chair. He slowly drew the "makin's" from his pocket, rolled a cigarette, lighted it, and blew little rings of smoke across the top of the lamp—watching the curling circles disappear as the heat broke them.

Miller waited, for he knew the man. He knew he would talk when he was ready—perhaps when he had finished smoking; possibly not at all.

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you," he answered, after the cigarette had burned close to his fingers.

"Well, I can't tell yet. I ain't lookin' for Californi' oranges in apricot cans," said Miller, "neither be I hankerin' for any short grass, cow-camp yarn; and I'm too old to take any stock in Santa Claus, so stick to facts."

"And if I tell the truth, what can I expect from you?" asked Mitchell.

"Just what belongs to you."

"All right—I was in the express office when it happened—"

"You don't mean to say—" interrupted Miller.

"Wait—you've got to let me tell it. I came up the street and saw Edwards bending over the desk. I knew him years ago—up in Pintado—before you and I rode for the Broken-Arrow outfit. I went in to see him. He'd hardly let go my hand when some one— Is there back stairs up from the creek at the rear?"

"Yes, an old pair that Edwards used when the creek was dry," Miller replied quickly.

"Well, some one," continued Mitchell, "started up the stairs. Edwards said: 'You go into the cellar. It won't do for any one to see you talking to me. He might know you, and it would look bad.'

"I slipped into the cellar. You know it's nothing more than what's washed out under the floor by the creek. Here's what happened, as near as I can tell it.

"I heard the back door open, and shut. Some words I couldn't hear—a scuffle, then a shot. Some one went out the front door—all in less time than I'm tellin' it.

"I crawled back through the cellar hole. Edwards lay on the floor, dead. I didn't take a minute to decide. No one in town would stand for the story. I know my reputation—so I broke for cover. The only mistake I made was stopping in The Oasis. But Benson had promised to reset my pony's forward shoes, after supper.

"I saw him in there, drinking, as I went by, and knew he hadn't gone to work. I went in after him—he was partly tanked up and wouldn't leave until he got ready. So I waited. You know the rest."

Miller listened, almost impatiently, to the story; for between each sentence there was a slight pause—a silence; in which it appeared Mitchell was mentally sifting the facts. Not the slightest trickle of embellishment had leaked into the narrative. It was a portrayal that characterized the peculiarity of the man—a peculiarity that had marked this man when he knew him in the Socorro County.

Before Mitchell had tested the possibilities of quick profits in running strays across the border into Mexico; before he had been attracted by the silver-studded saddles, the fancy horses, and the loud, free and easy characteristics of the open range lot who infected the Bitterwater valley, and before his name had been connected with things that turned every honest man's outfit against him.

"Mitchell," he said, rising from the table, "you've herded me where there ain't much grass and no water. I don't know as I can blame you for not tellin' the story—"

"I knew you wouldn't believe me," Mitchell broke in.

"I didn't say—" Miller began, but stopped as the door swung open with a snap, and Santi, the boy from The Oasis, rushed into the room.

"Meestaire Millair!" he exclaimed, "I most can't breathe. I run so fast. Frisco and de gang from de Oasees dey say he,"

pointing to Mitchell, "keel Edvards, aix-prais man, and mus' string heem up—queek laik hell. Frisco says dees man is wat you call de Queek Mitchell from up Socorro countree—black - laig—ah—mail-robbaire—um—cut-neck; *mucho mas*—I can't remembaire."

"And I 'spose Frisco is fillin' 'em up with red-eye, and tellin' 'em the thing to do is to get Mitchell, ain't he, Santi?" asked Miller, drawing on his knowledge of the man.

"Yes—dere comin' down and geet heem—ma fren'—" moaned Santi.

"I thought so. Leave it to Frisco, if you want grass fired," muttered Miller.

"But there's plenty of time for me to shake 'em," said Mitchell, rising.

"But you're goin' to stay," added Miller emphatically.

"And let you turn me over to 'em?" as he backed toward the open door, gun in hand.

"So I measure up to that, do I?" growled Miller, stuffing his hands deep into his pockets, and deliberately turning his back to Mitchell, hesitating at the door.

"Santi," he said, looking down at the face still puckered with excitement, "you and me must look like the last of a litter of coyote pups."

"See here, Sliver, I don't understand the game; loosen, what is it?" Mitchell interrupted sharply.

"It's just this," answered Miller, turning and walking straight toward him, disregarding the gun that covered the buckle in his cartridge-belt. "I'm marshal here, and this thing—this Edwards business—ain't clear yet. If you've got one bit of sense left, you'll see that my reputation depends on your stayin' and facin' the music. If you won't stay, willingly, then by—"

"I'll stay," was the quick response.

"Then you and Santi go into the back room there. You can hear what's said. If you think I need any backing up, give it to me—and give it to me quick."

The man and the boy went into the room, and Miller followed them to the door.

"That winder," he said, pointing to the rear of the room, "faces my corral. There's two horses out there—the buckskin is the best. In case I'm in front of a gun when it goes off, take the buckskin and slope. Don't wait! There ain't but one man in Sand City that'll believe you." Then he closed the door.

Going to a shelf, he took down a pan, filled it with potatoes and water, sat down with the table between himself and the door, and began to peel the potatoes.

To him, Mitchell was the same awkward boy who had drifted into the Broken-Arrow outfit, at the fall round-up, years before. He'd gone bad since then, and maybe, after all, he'd been lying to him; but there was a possibility—just the slightest—it could have happened as he said. He drew his heavy gun from the holster and slid it under the pan. Anyhow, he was marshal, and Mitchell was in his charge; and Frisco was assuming something that was contrary to the principles he had advertised in the conduct of that office.

He stopped the peeling for a moment, opened the drawer in the table and slipped a second gun beneath the pan.

The peeling continued until the sand grated on the floor, and the human fan opened out before him with a rattle, as the gang came in and filled the end of the room.

"Well," said Miller, looking up into the leering face of Frisco, marked with a blue welt that extended from chin to ear.

"Where's Mitchell?" blurted Frisco. "We've come after him and we're going to have him. This 'law and order' business of yours won't go this time. I know him, and so does Dry Spring Jones here. Mitchell's the man that done for Edwards, and we're going to make an example of him. Where is he? You two went out together? You didn't let him dust, did you?" he sneered.

"Say, Benson," asked Miller, ignoring Frisco's string of questions, "did you promise to set the forred shoes on Mitchell's pony?"

"Yes, I did," Benson replied thickly.

"Frisco, did you see Mitchell kill Edwards?" inquired Miller eying a potato critically.

"No, of course not," he growled.

"Then, how do you know so much about it?" as the potato dropped in the pan with a thud.

"We've figured it out that—"

"And where was you when the job was done?" Miller interrupted.

"In The Oasis," was the quick answer.

"You didn't see Mitchell in there?"

"No, he wasn't there," he answered emphatically.

"And so you've figgered that as long as

he wasn't in The Oasis he must have killed Edwards. And you've come down here to get him on that evidence? I s'pose that's good reasonin', but somehow I don't quite get the run of it. The rest of you—all of the same opinion, I s'pose?" he asked, looking over the faces about him.

The muttered responses indicated that they all were in perfect accord with Frisco.

"Well, I'll tell you," said Miller slowly, his fingers sliding under the pan onto the smooth handles beneath it. "Mitchell is just this minit in the custody of the law—me bein' the law—and here."

"You mean you don't intend to give him up?" asked Frisco.

"You've treed the coon," answered Miller.

"Then we'll take him. In the back room, boys!" yelled the gambler.

Even before Frisco had finished, Miller sprang to his feet, threw the pan into the faces of the foremost, and flattened himself against the little whitewashed door — a forty-five in each hand.

"Stiddy — stiddy!" he yelled. "I'm gittin' to a killin' fast. No foolin' now! I'll kill the first one of you that moves.

"Listen," he continued, feeling for the temper of the crowd; "Mitchell is—"

Then the door opened at his back. He moved a little, and looked over his shoulder. Mitchell walked into the room. In his right hand was a gun, in his left he held a package.

Crossing straight over to Frisco, he said: "Frisco, you were a good friend of Edwards?"

"Yes," came the sullen answer.

"You'd do all you could to get the man who done for him—you'd go out of your way, wouldn't you?"

"Yes,"

"Then take this package," said Mitchell, passing it to him. "Hold it up, so that everybody can see it," he said sharply.

Miller saw a long, brown express envelope, with two unbroken red, wax seals, a piece of tape between them. It was intact, excepting one corner, which had apparently been torn off.

The stillness within the whitewashed walls was marred only by the heavy breathing and the squeak of leather.

"Come out, Santi," called Mitchell sharply, shifting his look squarely at Miller, as if to insure his silence.

The boy came out of the darkened room.

"Tell them how I come by the envelope," said Mitchell.

"I was cleaning out one of de boxes on de gallairee of de Oasees when a man came in de box. I step behind de curtin. De man he raise up a board in de floo' and stick de packeege in de hole. I cough and he see me. He drop de board back. De cornair de packeege steek out. He tair de corner off and steek it in hees vest pockeet, den he—"

"That's enough, Santi," said Mitchell. "How did I get it?"

"I told you about it in de room dere, and you said: 'Go get de packeege and bring heem to me.' I jump out de window. Run get de packeege and bring heem back."

"That's a fine yarn, Mitchell," said Frisco, "but it's too thin. The kid's got his lesson all right, and it's time you got yours!"

There was a little movement on the part of Frisco to lower the envelope and to raise his gun, but there was a quicker movement, by the fraction of a second, on the part of Mitchell. The same half circle of the blue barrel, and the end stopped in the fly of Frisco's shirt and stayed there.

"Wait," he said calmly. "There's one chance in a hundred, that the man who tore off the corner of the envelope, still has it in his pocket. Just hand your gun to Miller, Frisco, and the envelope, too."

Miller took the pearl-handled Colt's and the envelope. Two things he noted—the torn corner, and the number, 3005.

"Now, Frisco," said Mitchell, feel in my vest pockets," as he handed his own gun to Miller.

Frisco's fingers slid into the pockets, from which he drew matches, cigarette papers, and spines from the toothpick cactus.

"Now then — dig into your own — the lower right hand," prompted Mitchell, stepping back.

It was then that the welt across the face of Frisco turned to crimson.

For an instant he stared into the blue eyes of Mitchell. In that instant all the fury of a wounded puma seemed to be gathered in his own.

With a little jerk of his head and a tightening of his lips, he drew from his pocket a small, three-cornered piece of brown paper, and snapped it onto the table.

"You win," was all he said—the spirit of his kind predominating.

And that's how they got Frisco.

The Secret of the Dunes

By Richard Duffy

IT came on me with sneaking suddenness, like a clock stopping. You don't notice it till some time after it happens.

I had brought the car to the house on Park Avenue, as I did every morning, to take Mr. Andrews down to his office.

The second man, who opened the door, didn't expect me to go in, but I brushed past him. He said something about Mr. Andrews being engaged.

Up-stairs I went slowly because I had to. I knew where the dining-room was, and heard Mr. Andrews and another man talking in the hall.

"I shall fight against any public alarm," Mr. Andrews was saying, "so long, doctor, as things are so upset in the Street. It would mean a run on five banks—do you understand?"

"You'll never find your man, then. You're asking people to search for him and you blindfold them," the other man said.

"Mr. Andrews! Mr. Andrews!" I called out.

"What are you doing here?" my employer asked sternly. "Who told you to come into the house?"

"I give up my job—I give it up, see?" I cried, searching the landing, my whole body in a shiver.

They both backed into the dining-room.

"Come over by the window," Mr. Andrews said. "What's wrong with you, Hanson?"

"I'm all in!" I gasped, lifting my hands, which were heavy as stones.

"This is my chauffeur, doctor," Mr. Andrews informed the other man. "Will you take a look at him?"

The doctor felt my pulse, listened to my heart, and asked me a number of questions.

I told him I never drank, and slept and ate regularly until two weeks before, when I had a bad attack of grippe. In driving the car over this morning I didn't seem to be able to work my hands or feet the way I wanted to. I nearly collided with a trolley, and then the big scare came over me.

"I wouldn't dare to take you down-town, Mr. Andrews," I said, terrified. "I don't ever want to see any car again. I'm done. I give up my job."

"Nonsense, man," the doctor began.

"You're nonsense," I snapped. "D'ye think I want to kill people?"

"Don't talk that way, Hanson," Mr. Andrews interposed. "You don't understand the doctor."

"You're run down, Hanson," the doctor said, "and you're suffering from the nerv-

ous exhaustion following your grippe. Get a month's rest in a quiet place and you'll be all right."

That's how I came to go to Mr. Andrews's house near Hampton. It was way out on the end of Long Island, and was in charge of a Norwegian and his wife. Mr. Andrews only used it from July to October about.

Rond, the caretaker, had his instructions from Mr. Andrews by telephone, and met me with a horse and buggy.

I felt better when I saw the horse. I was afraid Rond would have a machine.

We ate supper all three together. Rond was six feet tall and blond, about forty, I guess. His wife was a little fat blonde, forty-five at least.

They seemed worried and afraid to talk. I supposed it was because Mr. Andrews had cautioned them against speaking of me being sick. Anyway, they took my coming with a good deal of surprise, I thought, but they didn't say a word about why I came.

My appetite was all to the bad, and as I didn't get infatuated with either Rond or his wife in the course of dinner, I went right up to bed when the coffee was put on the table.

The doctor had said I must leave off coffee for a month.

It was a big palace of a room I had, plenty of steam heat, a bully-looking bed, lots of windows, and a private bath.

It was fierce trying to get asleep, though. Not a bit of noise, not a sign of life in the whole world, it seemed, except the ocean miles away groaning on the beach.

I would have taken all the pills the doctor gave me only I was afraid they'd put me to sleep for keeps.

When I woke it was just dawn. But that was not what rattled me.

I woke because a man touched me on the shoulder.

It was not Rond, the caretaker, but a man nearly as tall as Rond. He wore high rubber boots strapped about his thighs, corduroy breeches, and a yellow oilskin coat. He kept his sou'wester on his head.

He was a better-looking man than Rond, and was growing a beard that looked about two weeks under way, and white in spots.

I was so frightened I didn't holler. I tried to ask him why he was there, but I couldn't get a word out.

My door was locked. How had he got into the room?

While I was wondering he pressed a letter into my hand, put his finger on his lips, and strode noiselessly over to the window I had left open at the bottom.

He climbed up on the window-seat, stepped out, and vanished.

I lay back on the pillow, feeling as if the bottom had fallen out of my insides.

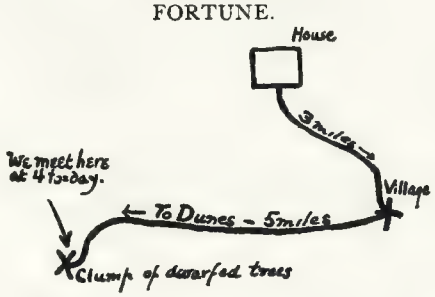
Then the shakes took me again. I got up, swallowed two more of the doctor's pills, and hugged the radiator. It was cold.

I put on all my clothes and was going to slip into bed, when I saw a white envelope lying on the floor.

If it hadn't been for that I was ready to believe I'd been having a nightmare, and no man, tall like Rond, had come in the room at all.

On a single sheet of paper, inside the envelope, there was some printing and a diagram.

STRICT SILENCE MEANS YOUR FORTUNE.



Unless You Come Alone You Meet No One and You Are No Wiser Than Before.

II.

I WAS commencing to feel warm in bed when steam began to clank in the pipes.

At seven Rond knocked at my door.

I got up and let him in. He had my breakfast on a tray.

"Did you sleep well?" he asked in his harsh voice, and I noted again the worried look of the night before.

"Pretty fair," I said, bracing myself.

"I wanted to tell you about it last night," he went on, as he fixed the tray on the table. "But my wife said no—wait till this morning."

"About what?" I demanded quickly.

"If you should get to talking to anybody in the village, don't be alarmed if they tell you Mr. Andrews's house is haunted. It's a thing you hear sometimes round this place. My wife and I laugh at it."

Something in the way Rond said this marked him with indelible suspicion for me.

But I grinned and returned: "All I'm scared of is machines, and I'll be cured of that soon."

He seemed reassured at this, and, telling me that we were to have dinner at twelve and supper at six, he went out.

I made out a good breakfast, the first in so long I could not remember. I said to myself I wouldn't do a thing about anything until I had food.

Then I pored over the diagram again. It looked just the same. I examined the window by which my strange visitor of the night had disappeared.

Outside of it was a narrow balcony that ran some distance along this side of the house. It was so frail and narrow it seemed to have been built more for ornament than for use.

"I don't wonder," I said to myself, "that Rond and his wife laugh at the idea of this house being haunted."

When I appeared down-stairs Mrs. Rond met me and was more cordial, less shifty. I told her I was going for a long walk, but would be back in time for dinner.

The Andrews estate was a great big place off from everywhere; and I calculated I did a good three miles of lonely road before I hit the outskirts of the village. You see, I was keeping tabs on my diagram, though I had no idea of chasing myself out to the dunes to meet the guy that made his dates in such a wild-eyed way.

My game was to get Mr. Andrews on the long-distance, and say something queer was going on in his house, and I wanted to go back to New York at once if he wouldn't come down.

He had given me to understand that only the caretaker and his wife lived in it. I wasn't in any form to have strange men sneak into my bedroom and wake me up, and then have Rond tell me some people said the house was haunted.

I called him up on Park Avenue and at the office. They both told me Mr. Andrews had gone out of town the night before. They did not know or would not say where he had gone or when he would be back.

Coming out of the telephone-booth in the station I met Rond.

"Muddy walking, this morning," he grunted. "Feeling better?"

"I'm all right," I said sharply. "Ain't nothing wrong with me except my nerves."

"Your nerves," Rond returned, "are not nothing. They are everything."

When he showed signs of sticking to me I said I guessed I would turn round and walk a little way toward the shore.

"I ain't walked so much since I was a kid," I added.

He mumbled something about dinner at twelve, and I turned briskly in the other direction.

I had gone not more than a hundred and fifty yards and was about to take a bend in the road. Something prompted me to look back. I saw no sign of Rond, though the way he was going was straight as a string for half a mile.

There was no house he could have gone into either, except the railroad station.

Back toward the station I went rapidly.

Suddenly I stopped.

From behind the massive trunk of a weeping willow Rond appeared. He was smiling, and I noticed his teeth were all brownish black.

"I would have gone with you, if you had asked me," he said pleasantly. "That's certainly a lonely walk for a man to take by himself."

This made me mad, and I growled:

"Say, Rond, you're caretaker of Mr. Andrews's house; am I right?"

"Yes," he replied, every muscle of his huge frame taut.

"Then keep an eye on the house," I added. "I don't need a caretaker."

"I obey my employer's orders," he rejoined, as simply stating a fact.

Enough. I saw at once what I was up against. I could go back to New York that same afternoon, unless Rond tied me with a rope, and big as he was, he would have had his hands full to do that.

But I was feeling different since I got away from the noises and smell of machines. My pay was going on while I was taking a rest; and if Rond and his wife were up to any queer deal, why shouldn't I fix myself more solid with my boss by getting wise to it?

My tactics with Rond were changed in that instant. We walked along side by side, and I told him in a funny way how my nerves had been acting up with me.

He was very sympathetic, and I put on that I was much impressed by his interest and his wife's.

She wasn't there when we got back to the house, after spending a couple of hours loafing about the village.

On the table the breakfast dishes remained, and in the spoon-glass was a letter.

Rond tore it open and read it with an agitation he did his best to hide.

He reflected a moment before saying:

"My wife's been called away to a sick neighbor's house. I'll get dinner. I can cook as well as she can, but I hate to clean up afterward."

We made out fine with chops, peas, and potatoes. Then we had some preserves, and the best cup of cocoa I ever drank. I felt so good I wanted to smoke, but I remembered what the doctor had said.

Anyway, I'd thrown my cigarettes out the window when I got on the train.

All the time, though he was as smooth as a new tire, I could tell there was something on Rond's mind that made him uneasy.

He was just lighting his pipe—it was about two o'clock — when the telephone rang. He talked only a minute or two in Norwegian, I guessed, because it was foreign. Then he came back into the dining-room more excited than I had yet seen him.

"I must hitch up and drive like the deuce for another doctor," he said. "That neighbor my wife's with has got worse."

"Go ahead," I said. "I'm all right."

"I won't be gone more than an hour or so," he cried, running out the back door to the stable.

When I'd seen him go galloping down the road with the station wagon all tightly covered, I thought it was a good time to hunt about.

Down-stairs all the rooms were open; but on the next floor every door except mine was locked. Looking out my window I spied round the country to make sure no one was on the road, although it was half a mile off.

I climbed out on the narrow fake balcony, I called it. It was like walking in a paper bag, so small and likely to tear. But I tiptoed along a fierce distance for that kind of going until I came to a window.

It was open, and I let myself cautiously into the room, which was not so big as mine or so well furnished. On a square table was a map of this part of Long Island, stretched under plate glass. There was a smell of tobacco in the room, and a man's things lying about.

I was going to open the door of the closet when my eyes fairly jumped at sight of a lot of hundred-dollar bills stuck with thumbtacks in that wall. Their yellow backs grinned at me, and there was something about the crazy design they formed that struck me as familiar.

Then it came to me. I pulled from my pocket the diagram the man in the night had given me. The lines of the hundred-dollar bills were straight or crooked just as the lines of my diagram. There must have been about twenty-five bills or more. I'd never seen so many in my life.

By my watch it was two-thirty-five. I stole back to the balcony and picked my steps to my room.

The Ronds had no intention of letting me know about this man, I thought. I got my own chance. Then I started off at a stiff gait for the dunes.

I had gone only a short distance beyond the village, following the direction shown in the diagram, when a horse and wagon turned in from a cross-road and came toward me at a galloping pace. Stepping quickly to one side, I saw Rond on the front seat of the station wagon in which he had left the house about an hour before.

He grinned greeting at me. I waved my hand. I supposed the doctor was in the back of the wagon, which was covered. As I stood in the road watching it get small in the distance, it rocked like a boat in a rough sea.

"A well-built wagon like that," I thought, "shouldn't heave that way. This road ain't so awful bad."

I plodded along, looking every once in a while at my diagram, for luck. I was wondering whether Rond and his wife were bound up in some crookedness, or I was going loony instead of getting better.

It was five minutes of four when I reached "the clump of dwarf trees" as marked on the paper. The dunes, a kind of dirty white, stretched for miles and miles till they touched the sky.

There was no more sign of a man round there than there was of a taxicab.

"You're the goat," I told myself at ten minutes after four, and started back for Mr. Andrews's house.

On the way I stopped in the post-office and wrote a letter to Mr. Andrews, telling him about the man that came into my room at night, about the hundred-dollar bills on the wall I saw, and I enclosed the diagram

the man gave me. I said I didn't think the Ronds were on the level.

The postmaster held his bag open about three minutes so that I could put my letter in. It would be delivered in New York next morning, he said.

III.

EVERYTHING was lovely at supper that night. Mrs. Rond said her neighbor was better and pretty well out of danger now, and Rond cracked his wife up as being the best nurse and best wife in the country.

Maybe I'm naturally suspicious, but I didn't feel their good spirits were genuine. I was dead tired after walking so much, and went to bed at nine o'clock.

Taking a chance at dying of bad air, I locked all my windows. Anybody wanting to come in that way would have to break glass first.

What time of night it was I had no idea. I thought I was dreaming I was in a fight when a pistol was shot off right outside my door.

There was a groan and the thud of a body falling.

"No hero business for you," I said to myself, remembering my door was locked.

Meanwhile I was jumping into my clothes. I even put on my overcoat and hat.

I opened the door, keeping it as a shield in front of me.

From down-stairs came sounds of a scuffle, and Mrs. Rond's voice saying:

"Don't you dare to leave this house."

"I cannot strike a woman," a man fairly shrieked. "But I must go! I must go!"

In the pan of light from my room I saw Rond lying still and silent at the head of the stairs.

I stepped over him softly, and tiptoeing down three or four steps, leaned on the rail and looked down.

The man had forced Mrs. Rond to the floor and was stuffing a gag into her mouth.

His oilskin coat and the high rubber boots I recognized instantly.

He was the man who had given me the diagram.

I beat it down-stairs, but he was too quick for me, and leaped through the front door as I reached the hall.

Leaning over Mrs. Rond, I jerked the gag, made of knotted rope, out of her mouth.

She seemed stunned, and I judged she must have struck her head when he knocked her down.

"Police!" she groaned. "Catch him! Catch him!"

In a second I was on the veranda. The moon was high and full, making the world almost as light as day.

There was my man running as well as he could in his high boots. I went after him, and in my light shoes took the handicap for a prize.

Near the county road I got within fifty yards of him. Knowing he had a gun, I stood behind a tree and yelled:

"Say, you, where are you going?"

He didn't take any more notice of me than if he were deaf. He was walking now, but going in good time.

I looked back toward the house. Mrs. Rond had her hands full to take care of her husband, I knew. Then it struck me! Suppose Rond was dead. Here was his murderer getting away.

So I kept on the trail of my oilskin friend, always hanging about a block behind. I slunk in the shadow of the trees all along. He marched in the middle of the road, like a soldier, looking straight ahead. Through the village we passed like spooks in a graveyard.

I held my watch out in the moonlight. It was a quarter to two. It didn't take me more than a couple of seconds to do this, but when I looked up again the oilskin man had disappeared.

If this had happened in the village I shouldn't have been so much astonished; but now we were out in open country, following the road to the dunes, the very road I had covered that afternoon.

There were only a few trees here, and I thought the man might be hiding behind one of them. That's why I zigzagged widely when I came near a tree. If he hadn't had the gun I would not have been so scared.

Suddenly he popped up almost under my nose. He had been sitting on a stump in the shadow. I must have jumped about a foot.

"Don't be afraid of my gun," he said, showing it, "I only use it in case of necessity."

"You maybe killed a man," I said.

"Nonsense," he returned. "I'm too intelligent to spoil my life-work by such a blunder."

"You're cool enough about it," I thought,

while he went on to inform me that he had seen me arrive at the house and judged at once I was the very man he needed. I seemed to be strong, alert, and young.

But from the moment of my coming to the house the Ronds had resorted to every precaution and device to prevent us from meeting. This was to explain why he had sneaked into my room through the window.

"It was mere jealousy on Rond's part," the man went on, "because I won't take him into my confidence. He knows I've had the shack built down on the dunes. I've even let him inside of it, but have always told them both I am making a specialty of sea sand and vegetation.

"Of course, they know I'm lying. That's why Mrs. Rond followed me this morning—because she suspected I was going to take up with you. It's quite possible, as they're always spying on me, that they discovered I went into your room during the night. Or, you may incautiously have said—"

"Not a word," I broke in. "You said to keep mum, and I did."

He wasn't a servant like Rond. He was like a fellow boss, though he was in oilskins and his coming beard looked fierce. But he had the sharpest, brightest eyes I ever saw. I felt if I was working for him he could make me do anything.

That's how I came to go with him to his shack, which was fully half a mile beyond the clump of dwarfed trees where we were to meet at four in the afternoon.

When he told me how Rond had come behind him and struck him down and bound him with ropes before he put him with Mrs. Rond in the back of the station-wagon, I understood why the wagon had been rocking so on a fairly decent road.

"They both got some of that rope down their throats," he added, with a grim smile, "when they tried to stop my coming out to-night. And to think I pay them fifty dollars a week for my room and board. Half the time breakfast is all I take there."

I could see Mr. Andrews's face when I told him of this fat graft the Ronds were working in his house.

Under the moon and with the sea crashing on the shore those dunes looked queer. I could not believe they were real. And when my oilskin man, who told me to call him Professor Judd, pulled up a trap-door in the floor of the shack, and showed me an old tin box full of shining gold pieces, I just held my breath to make sure I wasn't dreaming.

"This is the secret of my work," he said softly, holding up the lantern as if to search every corner of the shack. "I do not gather sea sand, but gold, and I shall have it in tons, young sir."

He went on to explain how perilous it was to keep it there, and that's what he wanted me for. I was to take this gold to the bank and have it put in a vault.

"How can you trust me?" I asked.

"Because"—and he fixed those strange eyes on me till I felt he was reading my soul like a newspaper head-line—"because you have the brains to look out for yourself. That's what keeps the most of us honest. What you will take away the first time for safekeeping is small compared to what is to be had by working with me faithfully. To play me false would make you liable to arrest, and ruin your whole life. You are a young man, with everything before you. You know that only honesty pays."

"I got to go back to New York in a month," I said.

"Plenty of time," he answered. "Now for rest."

He had a bunk there and also lots of blankets.

In fact, he had everything necessary to live in the place.

He gave me the bunk, made me take it, and stretched himself over the trap-door that hid the box of gold.

I was wondering how I was going to get asleep after all this, when first thing I knew my eyes opened in a glare of light. It was the sun shining through the window on the other side of the shack.

Professor Judd was emptying a can of beans into a frying-pan on the oil-stove, and the coffee-pot, on the second burner, smelled fine.

While we were eating breakfast the professor said he would show still further confidence in me by giving me the secret of his treasure find.

Many years before, a ship carrying gold and tobacco from America to England had been wrecked on this coast. Some of his ancestors, who had cargo in the vessel, handed down an account of the wreck. Every so often one or another in a generation had set out to unearth the treasure, and now, after a couple of centuries, he had at last come into what was his own.

About nine o'clock I started out with

a lot of the gold in a brand-new leather kit-bag. It weighed a ton. I had to be careful getting to the station that I didn't bump into Rond or his wife.

"I know my bullet only went through his arm," Professor Judd said, "and they are both such tough specimens they may be lively as crickets this morning."

"Wouldn't they track you here again?" I asked.

"I have my gun. The shack will tell them nothing, and even if they were to bring a posse I could lose them on the dunes. I know these sands as a gambler knows his cards."

Sure enough. The train for New York was slowing into the station when I saw Mrs. Rond drive up. I jumped aboard, pretty sure that she had not seen me, but not quite.

Rond stepped down from the back seat. I watched him from a window, screening myself behind the woodwork. Rond's arm was in a sling.

I was in the smoker, the front car, and hurried to the forward platform, where I could peek the length of the train. Neither Rond nor his wife got on, though they had gone into the station.

The town I was bound for was sixty miles down the line. I was to engage the safety vault in my own name and say the contents of the bag were old silver.

It was nearly noon when we reached the place. A train from New York was stalled at the station. Something had happened to the engine.

The passengers, only a few, were walking up and down the station while waiting.

I was going inside to ask the station-agent the way to the bank, when a hand gripped me suddenly on the shoulder.

"Hanson, I've got you!" a voice said.

IV.

I TURNED my head, scared, and looked into the face of Mr. Andrews.

"Yes, sir," I answered, not knowing what he meant.

"You were always straight, my boy," he went on. "See how luck goes against you now. It's one chance in a thousand we meet here. What's in the bag?"

"You ain't got nothin' on me, Mr. Andrews," I snapped, getting mad. "Before you accuse me of stealing, be slow. I got my rights. I'll sue you, no matter how rich you are."

"Why are you running away, then?"

"I ain't running away. I'm going back to Hampton this afternoon. Who told you—oh, those grafters, the Ronds, I'll bet!"

We sat in the waiting-room, and he informed me that the Ronds had called him on the telephone that morning.

"Then you didn't get my letter?" I asked.

He had rushed to a hotel for breakfast without waiting for the mail, because the Ronds had said they were attacked by a burglar in the night, and I had fled with the burglar.

"I couldn't believe it of you, Hanson," he went on. "I was sure some accident had befallen you when you ran after the burglar, and that's why I hurried down. But when I saw you here, suspiciously looking on every side, and carrying a bag as heavy as lead—"

I gave him my version of the night, and told him all about Professor Judd. I even let him examine some of the gold-pieces.

He grunted, and told me to put the bag in the bank, as the professor ordered me to do.

"I'll go to Hampton with you," he said. "First, I'll arrange for lunch at the hotel. You come back as quickly as you can. I want to meet the professor."

"But you can't," I objected. "He'd think I betrayed him. And he has a gun."

"I won't get you into trouble," he replied. "Didn't you say, too, he had a beard?"

"A kind of one, sir. It's not been growing long."

V.

MR. ANDREWS told me to drop from the off-side of the train and go my way toward the dunes. He was sure Rond would be at the station since Mr. Andrews had not appeared on the earlier train. It was after six o'clock, but the moon was climbing fine.

I had been going not longer than fifteen minutes, when I heard a horse behind me. It was the Andrews horse and station wagon, and Mr. Andrews was all alone in it.

He told me to jump up beside him.

"He'll recognize the wagon," I said, "and think the Ronds are in it. You better let me go by myself."

"Hanson," Mr. Andrews muttered, "this man's a thief. Do you still want me to believe you're in partnership with him?"

I got hot in the collar.

"So you believe that grafter Rond against me," I said. "And I've worked for you a whole year. All right. But I ain't goin' to see you beat up for buttin' in. We'll drive a little ways farther. Then you gotta walk."

He did as I told him, and when we had tied the horse to a tree I made him put on my coat and cap, and I took his. I gave him the bag, too.

"Professor Judd would pull his gun if he saw you comin' and he didn't think it was me," I said.

"I have a gun," he told me sharply, but he took the bag just the same.

I was half a head shorter than Mr. Andrews, and walked behind him till we came within two blocks of the clump of dwarfed trees.

"I duck here," I whispered, dropping into a sand-hollow. "Your line is straight. You'll see the trees in a minute."

I didn't want to see Mr. Andrews shot up—he was a kind boss—but I couldn't help wishin' Professor Judd would push his face in a little.

The rot of it! Taking the word of Rond against mine, and even dragging me in the deal.

A scream pulled me to my feet. It was so shrill and high it sounded like a woman's.

I could see nothing but the everlasting dunes and the moon. I ran toward the clump of dwarfed trees.

Suddenly, as if they came up from under the shore, I saw two men fighting like wolves, not half a block away.

Their figures looked black as ink in the brightness. Their legs and arms moved like crazy machinery.

I leaped along in the sand, trying to run. The whole world seemed of an instant darker. I thought it was my eyes; but I looked up and saw a thick cloud was covering the moon.

I looked at my men again. A shot rang out, and they both went down.

When I came up to them Mr. Andrews was leaning over Professor Judd, who was lying on the sand.

"I had to hit him, and I caught him behind the ear," he gasped. "He tried to shoot me, and I pulled the gun from him."

"Didn't I tell you—" I began.

"Shut up, you idiot!" Mr. Andrews said, standing. "You take his legs. We've got to reach a doctor quick."

We carried the unconscious Judd to a spot not far from the road; and then I led the horse and wagon up.

"Drive like mad to the station!" said Mr. Andrews.

I took it out of the horse, though I was wondering why Mr. Andrews was acting so nice to a thief. But he was excited.

At the station he made a dive for the telephone-booth and began to try to talk to the doctor in New York. The same doctor who had examined me!

"What do you know about that?" I was saying to myself, when I heard Mr. Andrews ring off and immediately call up police headquarters in New York.

All this time, about five minutes, I was standing guard over the professor. He looked a stiff—nearly.

"Is that you?" I heard Mr. Andrews ask. Then: "Have you talked to the police? No public alarm? For Heaven's sake, don't! Stop where you are, and we'll save a run on the banks. I've got him at my feet here. Sure?

"Don't you think I know the man whose lawyer I've been for ten years? You said he was crazy, and he is — tearing, raving mad. Why, he calls himself Professor Judd. All the money he took he's had out here on the sand-dunes, burying it, and then digging it up as lost treasure.

"Jump into a cab and go to every director's house. Give the right story, but not the whole story to the papers, signed by directors, in order to stop rumor. The reward? Yes, I know it's five thousand. My chauffeur gets that. He found him for me. Act like lightning. Good night. I'll be in town in the morning."

While he was making arrangements for a special train, Mr. Andrews cooled off and told me I was in for five thousand dollars' reward, but I must keep my mouth shut.

I asked him to handle it for me and invest it. I was afraid of so much money.

"Didn't the Ronds know he was crazy?" I asked.

"Did you?" said Mr. Andrews. "I'll go after them later. Did you look at any of those dirty gold-pieces that filled your bag to bursting?"

"Did I look at them?" I echoed. "They set me dizzy."

"But you didn't look at them," Mr. Andrews went on, "or you would have seen they were gold-pieces minted since 1850.

"They got me going. Now, you call up the local doctor. I'm out of breath."

In the Event of My Death

By

Gilbert Riddell

A COMPLETE NOVEL.

CHAPTER I.

THE SMALL PLAIN ENVELOPE.

THE tenant of room 813 in the Bradford Building telephoned a request for the presence of the superintendent.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Joyce," said the superintendent when he arrived. "What can I do for you?"

"Sit down," said Mr. Joyce. "As you know, I am a stranger in New York City. I know no one in this town except the family of my *fiancée*, and I do not care to consult them in this matter. You have been in charge of this building for many years, I believe you told me, and consequently must know something of business and business people. I am looking for a confidential secretary."

"Yes, sir," said the superintendent, as Mr. Joyce paused.

"For various reasons I do not wish to advertise, nor to answer advertisements," continued Mr. Joyce. "I desire, if possible, to find some one who shall be recommended to me by some one I know and have confidence in. I have confidence in you, and I have sent for you to ascertain whether you know of any one who could fill the position I have to offer."

The superintendent regarded the floor for a few minutes, and then he raised his eyes to Mr. Joyce.

"I have some one in mind, sir," he said.

"Very good," said Mr. Joyce with an air of relief. "But, before you send him to me, I want you thoroughly to understand the qualifications I require.

"First, and above all, I require a young man who can be trusted, who will be absolutely faithful to me in every way, who will die rather than betray any confidence I may repose in him. In other words, my future secretary must be capable, careful, and reliable—so reliable and devoted to me that I may be able to trust him with the greatest secret of my life just as I would trust myself."

The superintendent had been paying very close attention to Mr. Joyce's words, and when he replied his voice trembled slightly.

"I know exactly the young man you want," he said. "I will send him to you at once. You may take my word for it that you can trust him as you would yourself."

"Very well," said Mr. Joyce. "I should like to see him at once. Preparations for my coming marriage are occupying much of my time at present, and I need some one to look after my business matters."

"He can be here inside of an hour," answered the superintendent.

"Very good," said Mr. Joyce. "What is his name?"

"Franklin Raynes."

"Thank you," said Mr. Joyce, rising. "I shall expect him within the hour."

In less than an hour a tall, clean-shaven man, obviously very young, called upon Mr. Joyce.

"I am Franklin Raynes," he said simply. "I understand that you are looking for a secretary and wished to see me."

"Quite right," said Mr. Joyce. "Sit down. How old are you, Mr. Raynes?"

"I shall be twenty-two next month, the eleventh of March."

"And where do you live?"

"In this building."

Mr. Joyce had been making notes of the young man's replies. He paused with his pen over the pad.

"How is that? In this building? I was not aware that there were any living apartments in the Bradford."

"There are only the superintendent's apartments," replied young Raynes. "I am boarding with him—or, rather, he has very kindly allowed me to remain with him while I am searching for work."

"Hm!" said Mr. Joyce. "You need the position, then, quite badly."

Raynes sighed.

"Yes, I do. My last employer died suddenly a month ago. To be without a position for a month is a serious matter for me."

"Well," said Mr. Joyce, "if you understand the duties of a secretary and can fulfil all my other requirements as to character, I see no reason why you should be idle after to-day. Do you smoke, Mr. Raynes?"

"No," replied the young man.

"Do you take intoxicating liquors?"

"I do not and never have."

Mr. Joyce paused and leaned forward.

"Have you ever been arrested?"

The young man's face flushed slightly.

"Never," he replied.

"So," said Mr. Joyce, "you can truthfully say that you are perfectly honest and have a high moral character."

"I believe so," was the reply.

"Now," said Mr. Joyce, "I want you to understand that the position I have to offer is that of confidential secretary."

He laid a particularly heavy stress upon the word "confidential."

"You know what confidential means?"

"I think so," replied the young man with a slightly puzzled look. "It means that whatever may come to my knowledge during my engagement with you is to be kept absolutely secret by me. In other words, that I am never to speak of your affairs or anything even remotely connected with them, except upon your direction."

"Exactly," said Mr. Joyce, with a pleased smile. "It means all that — it means more. I have got to have your positive assurance, before I engage you, that no matter what you may learn regarding me or my affairs will never be divulged by you, even if you are obliged to lose your life or your liberty in guarding my secrets. Can you give me such an assurance?"

For an instant the young man paused. Mr. Joyce's words had made a great impression upon him. There was a frightened look in his eyes.

Mr. Joyce laughed.

"It is extremely unlikely," he said, "that you will ever be called upon to lose your life or liberty in my service, but the kind of young man who would do that rather than betray my confidence is the only kind I can engage.

"My affairs are very, very simple at present—merely those of a capitalist who invests his money carefully. There is little to do except to clip coupons and to keep some very simple accounts. You will not find the position difficult, and I should like you to take it, if you can give me the assurance I require."

Raynes had regarded Mr. Joyce very closely during his last speech. He stretched out his hand impulsively at the end.

"I promise you," he said eagerly.

Mr. Joyce clasped his hand and looked into his eyes for a full minute. Then he said quietly: "I believe I can trust you. Thank you. I forgot to ask for your letters of recommendation. Did you bring any?"

"Oh, yes," replied young Raynes. "I have brought one from each of my three former employers. Kindly read them."

Mr. Joyce glanced hurriedly over the letters, nodding his head with approval.

"Excellent," he said. "Each one emphasizes your trustworthiness, which is my chief requirement. By the way," he paused and turned round to look directly at his new secretary. "Do you attend any church?"

"Yes," said the young man, "the Congregational Church."

Mr. Joyce made no comment, and his secretary was unable to decide from the expression on his employer's face as to what effect his last answer had had.

The capitalist remained silent for a long time. Then he said:

"I am going to instruct you in your chief duty." He pulled out the top drawer of his desk on the right-hand side. "I wish you particularly to notice this envelope and the place where it is kept."

Raynes looked with some surprise at the small, white envelope which Mr. Joyce held up. It was sealed, but there was no address on it, and as far as Raynes could see, it was empty.

"In this envelope," said Mr. Joyce very slowly, "there is a key which will unlock this drawer."

As he spoke, he pulled out the second drawer of his desk on the left hand side.

"This top drawer," he continued, "is always open. But this second drawer on the left side is usually locked. It contains another small envelope exactly like this one, and in the second envelope there is another key."

He paused and closed both drawers. Then he looked directly at Raynes and spoke with greater impressiveness than he had yet used.

"In the event of my death," he said, "I want you to use those keys. First open this envelope which is in the top drawer and with the key which it contains unlock the second drawer and remove the other envelope. In it you will find a key to a safe deposit vault, together with the name of the vault.

"I want you to wait three days after my death, carefully concealing the fact that these envelopes exist. Then, at the end of the third day, go to the vault and open it. You will find money, stocks, and bonds. You may keep the money and turn over the securities to my heirs. Besides these, you will find a long, white envelope, sealed, but with no printing or writing of any kind upon it. Open that envelope and read its contents. Then act upon the information therein contained. Will you do this?"

"I will follow your directions to the letter," Raynes replied.

"That is exactly the promise I must have from you," said Mr. Joyce. "I have no more to say, except that I wish you to remember that this is your most important duty."

"I shall not forget it," said Raynes quietly.

Mr. Joyce looked at him and smiled.

"You have not made any inquiry about salary or hours," he said. "Suppose we say from nine until five, and one hundred dollars a month. Does that arrangement suit you?"

"Very well, indeed," said Raynes. "When shall I begin?"

"To-morrow morning," answered Mr. Joyce.

Raynes rose from his chair.

"Wait a minute," said Mr. Joyce. "In regard to opening those envelopes in the event of my death, you are certain that you fully understand my instructions?"

"Yes," replied Raynes earnestly, "I understand."

"Then," said Mr. Joyce, "I want you to remember one other thing particularly. You are to follow those instructions in another contingency.

"I mean, in the event of my disappearance. In that case, you are to wait four days before reading the contents of the envelope in the vault."

CHAPTER II.

THE ELEVENTH OF MARCH.

RAYNES found his duties extremely light. During most of the day he busied himself with arranging and rearranging his employer's desk and the furniture in the small office.

Mr. Joyce's business apparently consisted only in attending to the investment of his large capital. He was, though a young man, a conservative investor, who considered only a few of the largest industries as safe investments.

He was also much preoccupied with the arrangements for his approaching marriage, and spent more time purchasing his trousseau and visiting his *fiancée* than he spent at the office. In fact, nearly all the time he was in his office he spent in telephoning to his sweetheart or reading and rereading with great delight the stories printed by the daily papers about the contemplated marriage between "Miss Mildred Crane, the charming and most popular débutante of the season, and the youthful capitalist, Howard Joyce."

These accounts were also read with pleasure by Raynes. He dwelt upon Mr. Joyce's great wealth, generosity, and good looks with only less delight than upon the youth, wealth, and beauty of Miss Mildred Crane. Without a doubt this was to be the most ideal match New York City had seen in a long time.

As the event approached, Raynes shared his employer's increasing anxiety and enthusiasm, and on the final day but one dropped with him into the state of nervous depression which invariably attends such occasions.

Both were silent and abstracted on the tenth day of March, the day before the one set for the wedding.

As Mr. Joyce left his office in the afternoon he paused to shake hands with Raynes.

"You have proved yourself a very efficient clerk," he said, "and I believe that you are as devoted to me as I could wish. I shall not see you again for several weeks" —he paused — "unless — unless something unforeseen occurs. Do not forget my instructions."

"I shall forget nothing you have told me, sir," replied Raynes, "and if you will allow me, I desire to offer you my sincere congratulations and wishes for your future happiness."

"Thank you, Raynes," said Mr. Joyce. "I have every reason to believe that I shall be supremely happy. I am going to marry the sweetest and most beautiful girl in the world. Good-by!"

He shook hands heartily with his secretary and departed.

An hour later Raynes locked up the office and went to his home.

Promptly at nine o'clock the next morning he unlocked the office door, sorted the few letters which had arrived, and settled himself down by the window with the morning paper.

About ten o'clock the telephone-bell rang.

"Is this Mr. Joyce's office?" inquired a strange voice.

"Yes," replied Raynes.

"Is he there?"

"No," answered Raynes. "I do not expect him to-day. He is going to be married at noon."

"Yes, I know. Thank you," replied the voice, and the receiver at the other end of the wire was hung up.

Half an hour later the telephone rang again.

Raynes answered immediately.

A voice that seemed different from the first made the same inquiry:

"Is this Mr. Joyce's office?"

"Yes, this is Mr. Joyce's office, but he is not here. He is to be married at noon. Can I do anything for you?"

"Nothing, thank you. Do you expect Mr. Joyce there this morning?"

"No, I am sure he will not be here until he returns from his honeymoon. He told me so yesterday afternoon when he said good-by to me for several weeks."

"Very well. That is all. Good-by!" and the receiver clicked.

At eleven o'clock, or nearly so, the bell rang again. The same inquiries and the same replies were made. A quarter of an hour later another voice asked for Mr. Joyce, and Raynes gave the same answers.

This kept up at intervals of ten or fifteen minutes for the next hour.

At half-past twelve a man's voice, furious with anger, called over the telephone: "I want Howard Joyce. Is he there?"

"No, sir," promptly replied Raynes. "He has not been here this morning."

"Are you lying to me?" the furious voice inquired.

"No, I am not," replied Raynes.

The receiver was hung up without the usual good-by. Raynes sat back in his chair and waited. His face was very pale and his heart beat with undue rapidity.

One o'clock was his luncheon hour, but he did not go out. He remained seated beside the telephone, watching the green-twined wire, as if he expected to see the next voice before he heard it.

But the telephone did not ring again. He sat and watched it, starting at nothing, but no more strange voices inquired for Mr. Joyce.

Gradually his pulse became quieter and a little color returned to his cheeks. At half-past one he was calm enough to realize that he was hungry, and decided to go out for lunch.

He locked the office door and went downstairs. The superintendent was standing at the door.

"Good afternoon," he said.

"Good afternoon, Bowles," replied Raynes.

He paused as Bowles beckoned to him to wait. He was glad to stand still, for he found that his legs were still trembling.

"Your boss has gone away," said the superintendent.

"Yes," replied Raynes, "he went yesterday."

"Where did he go? On a vacation?"

"He is getting married to-day," replied Raynes.

"Nice, clear day for that," said Bowles;

"fine day for March. By the way, he's a rich guy, isn't he?"

"Yes, I believe he's very rich," replied Raynes.

"Don't you know?" demanded the superintendent. "Don't you handle his money?"

"Not his money," said Raynes. "I only keep the accounts about his money."

The superintendent looked at him sharply.

"Well, even at that, you ought to know something about his wealth," he suggested.

"Oh, he's rich enough," said Raynes; "richer than you or I will ever be. Good-by! I'm getting hungry."

"Wait!" cried the superintendent. "Listen! There's an extra!"

Raynes paused outside the door, Bowles beside him.

Two men with husky voices were bringing the noon-hour crowd to a standstill with their cry of "*Wuxtra!*"

"What is it?" asked the superintendent. "Can you make it out? Is it war with Japan?"

"No," answered Raynes, "it doesn't sound like that. I think I'll get a paper. Here, boy, give me an extra!"

The huge headlines saved him all suspense.

"Whew!" whistled Bowles, reading over Raynes's shoulder. "What do you think of that? What have you got to say now?"

Raynes dragged the paper away from him.

"Don't!" he said hoarsely. "Don't!"

"Oh, let's read the rest of it," cried Bowles. "You're not the bride. Why should you feel so badly?"

"Couldn't you be sorry for a girl like that?" cried Raynes angrily.

He turned impatiently away from Bowles and hurried around the corner to a small restaurant. There he seated himself at the most secluded table he could find. He spread the paper out and read the meager account in large type of that day's biggest sensation.

The edition had been sent to press so hurriedly that not even all the facts the reporters had gained in so short a time had been included—more details were promised in a later edition.

Raynes read the story through regardless of the waiter's urgent request for an order. Then he absent-mindedly asked for chops and coffee.

When they were brought he pushed the plates aside, and spreading the paper on the table, he sat and stared at Mildred Crane's picture with the shrieking headlines over it:

MILLIONAIRE DISAPPEARS.

Howard Joyce Deserts Mildred Crane at the Altar. Beautiful Heiress Attended by a Physician. Town Scoured for Bridegroom.

CHAPTER III.

RAYNES'S PROMISE.

RAYNES finally ate some bread and butter and drank his coffee, but his appetite had vanished. He had no interest in food nor in anything else, but the subject of the "extra."

He was feverishly anxious to leave the restaurant and get back to the office. But as soon as he was in the street his feet lagged. He suddenly became afraid to return to the Bradford Building. He knew that it was his duty to do so, but it was a duty he found it impossible to perform at once.

Instead, he walked hurriedly to Park Row, where he joined the crowds in front of the newspaper buildings. There he found that for the moment the disappearance of Howard Joyce, the young millionaire, was of far greater interest than the baseball score.

He was obliged to cross the street to see over the heads of the people. Every minute the man with the chalk wrote in huge letters on the bulletin-board several sentences, which proved, when read, to contain no new information.

The reporters, as usual, were pursuing the young lady's family, as the young lady was absolutely invisible, and they were apparently chiefly concerned in securing contradictory statements as to possible reasons for the disappearance of the young and wealthy bridegroom.

But they had learned nothing which could be added to the first extra.

Harold Joyce had not appeared at his own wedding; he had sent no word; he had not slept in his own apartment the previous night; his valet knew nothing of his whereabouts, nor did any one else who might be supposed to know.

But this lack of information was dished up in more extras with more sensational headlines, and Raynes bought every one of

them before he finally directed his reluctant feet in the direction of the Bradford Building.

It was at least half-past four when he left the elevator at the eighth floor and walked down the corridor. Some one was walking impatiently up and down in front of room eight hundred and thirteen. He paused and looked anxiously at Raynes as the latter inserted his latch-key and opened the door.

"Beg pardon," said the stranger, with a strong English accent. "Are you Mr. Joyce's secretary?"

"Yes," said Raynes, "I am. What can I do for you?"

"Will you let me come in, please?" said the other man. "I want to speak to you privately."

"Certainly," replied Raynes. "You may come in."

The stranger closed the door carefully behind him.

"I ought to introduce myself," he said. "You may have heard of me. I'm James Fisher, Mr. Joyce's valet."

"No, I have never heard of you before," replied Raynes, "except in so far as I knew that Mr. Joyce had a valet."

"Well, well!" said Fisher. "That is strange. But I must confess that though I knew Mr. Joyce employed a secretary, I cannot remember that he ever mentioned your name to me."

"It is Raynes," said the secretary.

"I am very glad to meet you, Mr. Raynes, though the occasion is not a happy one. You know, of course, that Mr. Joyce has disappeared."

"I have seen the newspapers," answered Raynes.

"The newspapers in this country," said Fisher, "print more than is true in many cases, but in this case, they have not been able even to pretend that they have found a clue. It is a very strange thing, Mr. Raynes."

"V[illegible]ge, indeed," said Raynes [illegible]ow do you account for it?"

"I can't account for it. I have tried, but I can think of no reason why a rich young man, about to be married to a rich young woman as lovely as Miss Crane is, should suddenly disappear, at least of his own accord. Do you think that he may have met with foul play?"

"What is the use of thinking about it?" asked Raynes. "Neither you nor I are detectives. It is for the detectives to speculate and discover."

"Very true," said Fisher, nodding his head. "We can only help them by telling them all we know about Mr. Joyce."

"But I know very little," said Raynes. "I never saw nor heard of him until a month ago."

"That is strange," said Fisher. "I was engaged by him about a month ago. The manager of the hotel where Mr. Joyce had his apartment, recommended me."

"During all the time you have served him, I suppose you have learned very little about his affairs, just as little, in fact, as I have?"

"I suppose so," replied Fisher. "He is a very reticent man. There was only one thing he said to me which was of any importance. He did not say that, either, until he had bound me to the strictest secrecy. It was something which I was to repeat to you in the event of a certain occurrence."

Raynes looked at the valet in surprise.

"When were you to repeat it to me?" he asked.

"In the event of Mr. Joyce's death or disappearance."

"Well," said Raynes, breathing quickly, "he has disappeared. It is time for you to speak. What is it you were to tell me?"

"He enjoined upon me that I was to repeat his exact words, as if he himself were speaking, and that before I repeated his message I was to be quite certain that you were listening as to his own voice."

"I understand," said Raynes. "I am listening in that way. Speak."

"I was to say just this."

Fisher paused. He was pale with the responsibility of his charge, but not as pale as the man who leaned eagerly forward, listening.

"'Remember,' said Mr. Joyce—'remember, above all things, to fulfil the promise you have made to me.'"

Raynes leaned back in his chair and eyed the valet questioningly.

"Is that all?" he asked.

"No," said Fisher. "He told me that I was to repeat that message to you upon the very first day of his disappearance, and that I was to add: 'Remember—this is the *first* day.'"

Raynes drew his hand across his forehead.

"Thank you," he whispered, and did not speak again for a few minutes.

Fisher watched him closely.

"There is something else I want to talk with you about," he said. "These Cranes have put a whole detective force on this job, and some of them have been at me all the afternoon."

"What?" cried Raynes. "Already? Did you tell them what you have just told me?"

"No," said Fisher, "I didn't. And that's what I want to ask you about. Some of them will be sure to come here presently. You must understand what Mr. Joyce meant by this message a great deal better than I do. Now, I want you to tell me whether I did right in keeping quiet about it when the detectives questioned me?"

"You did quite right," said Raynes emphatically.

He rose from his chair and walked over to Fisher's side.

"I cannot explain to you what Mr. Joyce meant. I am his confidential secretary, as you know. I am devoted to Mr. Joyce and to his interests. Nothing can change my loyalty. I would conceal anything rather than injure him in any way. Do you feel as I do?"

"Oh, yes," cried Fisher. "I never had such a kind master, and I would do anything to help him."

"Then," said Raynes, "tell the detectives absolutely nothing about the message you have repeated to me. It would not aid in tracing him, but would result in a misfortune to him. Will you now give me your promise?"

"Willingly," cried Fisher.

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed Raynes.

He sank down into his chair again, and wiped his forehead. In the space of a few hours the expression of his face had altered to one of settled anxiety.

"That being arranged," said Fisher, "I suppose there is nothing more to say. I will return to the apartment and wait for Mr. Joyce there. Will you wait for him here?"

"Yes," said Raynes; "I will wait here until he comes, or—"

He did not finish the sentence.

The door swung open and three men walked in.

Both Raynes and Fisher jumped to their feet. Fisher started to go out.

"Stay where you are!" commanded one of the men. "This is just what we wanted—to get you both together. Now, let us see which of you can give us the most information about Howard Joyce."

CHAPTER IV.

SEARCHING THE OFFICE.

FISHER had been answering questions earlier in the day, and was not dismayed at the sudden appearance of the three men. Two were quite familiar to him. One of these was Gerald Crane, the only brother of the deserted bride, and the other was the detective employed by him. The third man immediately announced himself as the attorney for the Crane family.

"I should like to know which of you is Mr. Joyce's secretary," he said.

"I am," Raynes replied. He spoke thickly and through pale lips.

"Very good," said the attorney. "Here is my card — Ashton Mars, 4000 Wall Street. This is Detective Walling. We have a warrant from headquarters to examine you. If Mr. Joyce has an attorney, I would advise you to send for him before we proceed to question you."

"If Mr. Joyce has an attorney in New York," said Raynes, "I do not know who he is. So I cannot send for him."

"In that case," said Mr. Mars, "I feel it my duty to warn you that you would better employ an attorney on your own behalf."

"Thank you," answered Raynes, "but I have not the means to employ attorneys. I have nothing to conceal, and so do not feel the necessity of being shielded. Moreover, I am as anxious as you to know what has become of poor Mr. Joyce. I shall feel grateful to you if you can get any information from me which will lead to the discovery of his whereabouts."

"Very well," said Mr. Mars, "I have warned you. We will proceed. Sit down, Gerald—sit down, my boy."

He turned round to the [illegible] who was pacing wildly up and [illegible]

"Sit down!" he excla[illegible] in a place inhabited b[illegible] tainly not. I cannot rest until he is found—until I have—

"He will be found," said Mr. Mars soothingly. "Sit down."

But he spoke to deaf ears. The young man continued to pace the room, while the others seated themselves.

Raynes took the chair at the desk, and, pulling out the leaf over the upper right-hand drawer, leaned his arm upon it.

"In the first place," said Mr. Mars, "when did you see Mr. Joyce last?"

"Last night," said Raynes.

"Did he act queerly?"

"He did not."

"Did he at any time speak of his approaching marriage?"

"Certainly."

"What did he say?"

"I cannot remember his exact words. He spoke in a general way, and mentioned especially the fact that his bride was a very lovely young woman."

"Did he give you any instructions in regard to performing your duties during his absence?"

"No; he said he would be away only a few weeks, and that I was merely to hold everything here until he returned."

"Did he give you any instructions in regard to his personal mail?"

"None whatever."

"So that everything that has arrived at this office since Mr. Joyce's departure is here yet?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where is the mail?"

Haynes picked up three letters lying on the desk.

"These are the only letters which have come for Mr. Joyce to-day," he said. "They relate only to business, and, while there is nothing in them to conceal, I should not think of allowing you to read them without a positive order from the proper authority."

Mr. Mars waved his hand.

"We will pass over the matter of letters at present. Now, Mr. Raynes, did any telephone messages come for your employer either to-day or yesterday [illegible] were at all peculiar."

"No, sir, I think not. Several times to-day people have rung up here and inquired for [illegible] but since the extras came [illegible] disappearance I have con- [illegible] inquiries must have been [illegible] and perhaps this gentle- [illegible] in the direction of Gerald Crane. Gerald stopped long enough to return the look with a deep scowl.

"Yes," he said, "I called up here and asked for the fellow."

Mr. Mars cleared his throat.

"Now," he said, "I want you to examine your memory very carefully, Mr. Raynes, and tell me whether at any time Mr. Joyce said anything to you which would suggest that he was likely to leave New York suddenly, or, in other words, that he contemplated any proceeding which might be construed as a disappearance?"

"No," replied Raynes, "he never said anything which would suggest such a thing to me."

"Has anything come to your knowledge during your employment with Mr. Joyce which would throw any light whatever upon this matter?"

"No, sir."

"So far as you know, he was in no money difficulty?"

"I am sure that he had no financial trouble of any kind," replied Raynes earnestly.

Mr. Mars sat back and considered the matter silently for a few minutes. Then he said impressively:

"Do not conceal anything from us, Mr. Raynes. It may be a serious matter for you if you do, and, moreover, it may prevent us from finding Mr. Joyce, which, if you are as devoted to him as you pretend to be, is a consummation you wish for as earnestly as we."

"I would give anything in the world," replied Raynes, "if you could find Mr. Joyce. Believe me, sir, that if there was any way in which I could help you, I would. But I have told you everything that I can tell you."

"Which is nothing," commented Mr. Mars, with a sigh. Then he turned to the detective. "You have examined Fisher quite thoroughly?"

"Yes," replied the detective, "and he knows nothing. Or if he does, he won't talk. There is nothing to do but to search this place."

"Search it!" cried Raynes.

"Certainly," said the detective, looking at him sharply. "What's your objection?"

"I have no objection," answered Raynes, catching his breath, "but I think Mr. Joyce might have some objection. In his absence, from whatever cause, I must act for him. I think I ought not to allow a search to be made."

"You can't prevent it," said the detective. "We have a warrant from police headquarters to search this place at any time, and we are authorized to use force if

we meet with opposition on the part of any one connected with the office."

"Very well," said Raynes suddenly.

He thrust in the leaf of the desk, drew out the top drawer, jumped to his feet, and walked away from the desk.

"Begin," he said briefly.

Striding past him, the detective began hurriedly to examine the contents of the desk. Mr. Mars joined him, and presently Gerald Crane stopped his pacing and took a hand in tossing the papers and letters about.

But they found nothing to interest them in the top drawer.

The drawer below proved equally barren, and the drawer below that yielded nothing but some very ordinary ledgers.

Then they began on the left side of the desk.

Raynes drew a little nearer as they finished searching through the contents of the top drawer.

Mr. Mars, who was sitting in the revolving chair, took hold of the handle of the second drawer and pulled. It did not open.

He looked up at the detective.

"This is the only drawer in the desk which is locked," he said.

"Have you the key for this drawer?" he continued, turning to Raynes.

"No, sir," replied Haynes, "I have not."

"Then we must break it open," said the detective.

Raynes bit his lips to force the color back to them—he knew that they were white although he could not see them.

"Please don't do that," he begged. "I am responsible for everything in this room until Mr. Joyce returns. That is an expensive mahogany desk. It would be a pity to ruin it when the drawer might be opened by a key."

"Have you any keys which you think would be likely to fit this drawer?" inquired Mr. Mars.

"I have several keys," said Raynes. "I have never tried any of them in that lock, but if you will allow me to sit there for a few minutes I will try to open the drawer."

Mr. Mars rose at once, and allowed Raynes to sit down. But both the lawyer and the detective leaned over him as he worked at the lock.

He tried several keys, tried them very carefully, but none of them would turn the lock.

"It is growing dark," said the detective. "Turn on the lights."

"The switch is right here," said Raynes. He leaned sideways from the desk and fumbled with the switch. Something seemed to be wrong with it. The lights in the one chandelier sputtered up for a minute and then went out.

Raynes continued his fumbling. Something glistened in his hand as the lights sputtered up again. But they went out quickly, and no one could tell what the glistening object might have been.

"What's the trouble?" asked the detective gruffly, walking around to the switch.

"Something quite serious," said Raynes calmly. "It looks as if the wire had been cut."

CHAPTER V.

THE SECOND ENVELOPE.

"IT is cut," said the detective promptly, as he felt round the switch. "We'll have to send for an electrician, as well as a locksmith."

"Don't bother about the locksmith," said Raynes. "I have unlocked the drawer."

He rose from the chair as he spoke, and in the semi-darkness the others saw that the second drawer on the right-hand side was open. They also saw, even in the twilight, that it was completely empty.

"That finishes the search," said Mr. Mars. "There is nothing else here to examine. I think you told me, Gerald, that you had examined nothing in Joyce's apartment."

"Of course not," exclaimed young Crane. "I wouldn't touch the fellow's things."

"I sho[illegible] to go up there now," said Mr. Mar[illegible] doubtless have a key to [illegible] I think you would h[illegible] go with us.

"Well, sir, replied F[illegible] don't know why I should l[illegible] master's property."

Walling began to b[illegible] a legal paper at th[illegible]

"Here's reason enough, he said. Don't try to butt against the law."

Raynes touched Fisher on the arm.

"It's useless to protest," he said. "I'll go with you."

It was nearly half past six o'clock, and

they were obliged to join the up-town rushing crowd in the Subway. Fisher and Raynes were not sorry for the noise and the jamming. They furnished sufficient excuse for their conspicuous lack of conversation.

Harold Joyce's apartment was situated in a small and exclusive hotel in the thirties. The searching party found little to examine in it, save a desk in the dressing-room, and that contained nothing of importance.

A bundle of letters in Mildred Crane's handwriting were bound together with blue ribbon, and on a slip of paper, fastened to the top of them, was written:

FROM MY BELOVED.

Gerald insisted upon taking these away with him.

"Before we leave," said Mr. Mars, "I should like to ascertain how long Mr. Joyce had occupied this apartment."

"I cannot tell you that," said Fisher. "I have only been here a month."

"We can get that information from the clerk as we go out," said the detective.

Raynes said good-by hurriedly to Fisher, and followed the searching party downstairs. He listened with great interest while they questioned the clerk, who could only tell them that Mr. Joyce had engaged his apartment on the first of January; that he had moved right in, and had reserved it until the first of April.

Upon the first of April, said the clerk, if Mr. Joyce had not returned by that time, they would be obliged to request his valet to move elsewhere and take Mr. Joyce's belongings with him.

As they reached the sidewalk Mr. Mars turned to Raynes, who had followed them out.

"Wait a minute," h[illegible] Raynes was about to walk [illegible] to speak to you."

Ra[illegible]d.

[illegible]w him away from Gerald [illegible] him in a low tone.

"Raynes," he said, "that [illegible]thing back."

"[illegible]nk it is?" asked Raynes, smiling a little.

"If I knew," replied the attorney, "it would be ridiculous to question you. Are you acting in your employer's interests by withholding the information I feel sure you possess?"

"If I were withholding any information whatever I should be able to answer your question; but it presupposes a condition which is not in accordance with the facts. I have no more to say."

Mr. Mars looked puzzled.

"You speak very well," he said. "Your loyalty to your employer is splendid. But I wonder if you realize what you are doing?"

Raynes smiled very gently.

"Yes," he said, "I realize perfectly. I am reiterating a very plain statement; that I have no information to give you."

Mr. Mars frowned with vexation; when he spoke again his voice was not so pleasant. He was unaccustomed to being frustrated by a boy of little more than twenty.

"Very well," he said, "we will ascertain the truth of your statement at another time."

Raynes only smiled as he walked away, but the smile vanished when he was out of sight of the three men.

Mr. Mars's words had not failed greatly to impress the lad. Raynes wondered if they intended to have him shadowed.

This phase of the matter required careful consideration. They could not, of course, put a detective upon his track at once, for none of them knew where he lived. But they could, and probably would, have a man at the office the following morning ready to spy upon every movement he should make.

He would no longer be a free man after the next morning. The hours of the coming night were all that were left to him in which to act without espionage.

But even now he was nervous. Several men who passed him in the street glanced at him. Raynes knew, of course, that these glances were quite casual, but they made him shudder. Every once in a while he looked round quickly to see if he were followed. Sometimes he thought he saw some one slink quickly away, but he could not be sure.

He walked about aimlessly for a long while. Finally he decided not to go to his boarding-house, but to put up at a hotel for the night.

He chose a quiet one on a side-street, ordered a light dinner, and had it sent up to his room.

When the waiter had removed the tray, Raynes locked the door, pinned his coat carefully over the transom, drew down the

dark-blue shades, and seated himself at the desk.

He took the two plain envelopes from one of his inner pockets and laid them on the desk.

One was torn where he had extracted the key under the very noses of the searching-party while he was pretending to fumble with the lock of the second drawer.

The second envelope was still tightly sealed.

Raynes dropped his head upon his hands and stared at the blank envelopes.

Ought he to open the second one?

His employer had been absent only one day. His instructions to Raynes had been to wait until the fourth day before opening that envelope, in case of his disappearance. He had been very impressive, and Raynes could not but doubt that he had a particular reason for stating the exact day upon which the envelope was to be opened.

He had even tried to make his instructions more impressive by leaving the message with Fisher, which had been repeated to Raynes that very afternoon.

The secretary considered the matter very carefully. But, in spite of his conviction that Mr. Joyce had an excellent reason for enjoining delay, Raynes wondered if he could have foreseen the fact that he would be watched by detectives. Mr. Joyce's great desire for secrecy must surely mean that the fewer people witnessed Raynes in the act of carrying out his instructions the better.

In that case, was it not the wisest thing to open the second envelope now while he was certain of being unobserved and conceal the key about himself? The more he gave his thoughts play, the more he became convinced this was the proper thing to do.

To-morrow he might not be able to do so simple an act as that without being seen. Moreover, he felt sure that it would be better to destroy the two envelopes and whatever writing the second one might contain at once.

Having reached this decision, he acted upon it.

He lifted the second envelope in his hand, and was surprised at its lack of weight. But, without considering that matter, he slid his knife along the top and ran his fingers inside, expecting to encounter a flat key.

With the forefinger still in the envelope, he paused, his eyes staring and the color rapidly leaving his face. For an instant he could not realize the truth. Then he dropped across the desk.

The envelope was empty.

CHAPTER VI.

BOWLES WATCHES.

RAYNES lay for many minutes as if the life had been crushed out of him. Then he weakly raised himself and looked at the envelope.

Staring at it, however, wrought no change in its lack of contents. There was no key in it, and he could conjure none into it.

Then he remembered that there was something else missing—the memorandum containing the name of the company from whom Mr. Joyce rented the safe-deposit vault. The envelope was as empty of memorandum slips as it was of keys.

In desperation, he turned the envelope inside out.

A bit of writing caught his eye. It was minutely done, right in the center of the envelope, as if the writer had held it open and upside down as he wrote.

Raynes was obliged to hold it close to his eyes to read it. Then he saw:

The Jameson Trust Company.
Remember to destroy the long, plain envelope.

Remember?

He could think of nothing else, but his remembrance and his keen desire to follow his employer's bidding went for nothing. Mr. Joyce had, by his absent-mindedness, rendered it impossible for his instructions to be carried out.

Raynes bit his lips with vexation. He had only to-night in which to think and act without obs tion. He must at least try to discover key.

It wa but he must go back for it. In sor velope, e- cause it had fingers just as he w the envelope,

Raynes struck the second envelo e. He was not likely to forget the name, the Jameson Trust Company. But he did not wish any one else to see it.

He did not wait to pay his bill; in fact, he reflected that it might be well to retain

that room for a few days. Outside the hotel he jumped on board the first car which came along. In twenty minutes he was ringing the superintendent's bell outside the Bradford Building.

It occupied some little time to arouse that individual, but the surprise of finding his young friend there at that hour seemed to compensate him.

"Discovered a clue?" he asked eagerly.

"Nothing at all has been discovered," replied Raynes. "I've forgotten some valuable papers that I want to get at once."

"Oh, valuable, eh?" said the superintendent. "I thought you said you didn't handle Mr. Joyce's money."

"I don't, either," replied Raynes angrily. "These papers are not valuable in the money sense."

"Well," said Bowles, "you needn't be so short with me. Remember, I got you that job. You ought to give me a little information when I ask for it, seeing that that's all I have asked for befriending you."

"Will you take me up in the elevator, Bowles?" asked Raynes immediately. "And stop your chattering? I'm tired. I want to go home and go to bed."

"Too tired to talk to an old friend like me," sighed Bowles. "You must be tired, indeed. Perhaps you'll feel fresher when I tell you that I've been talking to a long-lost friend of yours to-night."

By this time they had reached the elevator, and began to shoot up rapidly.

"Who's that?" asked Raynes sharply.

"Didn't know you had any long-lost friends, did you? Oh, this young man knew you from a youngster; nice chap. Must have been very fond of you. Wanted to know all about you, particularly where you live."

"Did you tell him?" cri- aynes.

"Yes, of cours- s. "Why not? When h- a see you and had kn- -se I told -- -ld c

-s home was -- rect.

-" he said -uppose you'd do as much for me at any -me."

Raynes held out his hand.

"Of course I would, Bowles," he said. "Don't wait for me now. I can run down the stairs and let myself out. You go on to bed."

"Just as you say," answered Bowles. "I'll wait for you if you like."

"No, thank you, it isn't necessary. I know the locks on the front doors. Good night."

The electric wires had not been mended, so Raynes had no light, save the occasional flicker of a match. This revealed nothing to him, except the few papers and letters with which he was already familiar.

He opened each drawer and carefully removed the contents, felt all over the bottom of the drawer, in the seams of it and underneath it. But he found no key.

Then his lack of matches finally conquered his desire for further search; he got out of the building as quickly as he could, afraid of encountering even Bowles again.

Bowles, on the top floor, leaned over the stair-well and watched Raynes go out. As soon as he heard the front door slam he ran down-stairs and went into the telephone-booth in the front hall. With some excitement he asked Central for a Morningside number. Then waited tensely till his call was answered.

"Hallo! Is this Mr. Crane's house? Is Mr. Walling there? Hallo, Mr. Walling! I've some news for you."

"All right," came the quick answer. "Go ahead. Anything important?"

"I think so," replied Bowles. "Our friend 'R.' has just paid a little call here. Didn't want me to wait round at all, and, when he thought he was all alone, began searching the place by the light of matches."

"Did he find anything?"

"Not a thing. That is—not what he was looking for."

"Have you any idea what that was?"

"Yes, I think I found it first. After you left here to-night I went down there and took a look round. Stuck in an empty drawer of the desk I found a very small, flat key."

CHAPTER VII.

WHERE IS THE VAULT?

RAYNES'S nerves ceased shivering only when he had boarded an up-town car and exchanged a few pleasantries with the conductor.

When he reached his hotel again he locked the door and sat huddled over the desk, considering the situation. It looked very serious to him. He had no other ob-

ject at present than to follow his employer's instructions, but as matters stood it seemed highly probable that he would never be able to do so.

To-morrow morning, of course, he would resume his search for the second key; but he felt no confidence in his ultimate success.

He drew the first envelope from his pocket and examined the key he had found in it. It was a very small, flat key, with a large serial number cut into it. He turned it over and over, but it suggested no method of solving his great difficulty.

He put it down and took up the envelope. He had only opened it a little way in order to remove the key. Now he slit it quite across with his knife.

The second envelope had contained a message for him. Why not the first? He turned it inside out. On the inside were written in the same minute hand the following words:

If the second key is missing for any reason, use this key. It will open the vault as well as the second drawer.

The relief which this message afforded Raynes was so great that he nearly collapsed.

Then he burned the first envelope, and threw away its ashes. The key he carefully placed upon his own key-ring.

It was nearly midnight now. It would be impossible for him to visit the Jameson Trust Company until morning.

Earlier in the evening he had considered going there and attempting to bribe the night watchman into permission to visit the vaults.

It was a desperate idea, suggested to him because of the great desirability of fulfilling his promise to Mr. Joyce without the observing eyes of the detective upon him. Doubtless he would have failed in the attempt, and certainly he would be sure to arouse suspicion in the watchman's mind if he went there at this hour.

He must wait until morning, hoping to elude the detectives. He reflected that if he went there straight from the hotel, he could do this. No one knew where he ha passed this night. He need not fear the detective until he should go to the Bradford Building. They would wait for him there, of course, as that was their only clue to his whereabouts.

With this plan in mind, Raynes went to bed and slept soundly.

The next morning he ordered breakfast and the newspaper brought to his room at the same time.

The first glance at the latter took away his appetite for the former.

The front page was entirely given over to the disappearance of Howard Joyce. Spread across the top was a headline and subhead which caused Raynes a few moments of intense excitement.

CLUE IN THE JOYCE CASE.

The story below it read substantially as follows:

Although the Cranes deny any knowledge of the discovery of a clue, it is believed that one has been found.

The new information suggests that Mr. Joyce's confidential secretary, Franklin Raynes, is in communication with his employer.

Raynes did not return to his boarding-house at any time yesterday, but at a late hour last night he went to the office in the Bradford Building, and instituted a search for something which he evidently did not find.

Later it was learned through the superintendent of the building, that the article for which Raynes searched was a small, flat key, which the superintendent had found stuck in the seam of a drawer in Mr. Joyce's desk.

This paragraph brought an exclamation of dismay from Raynes. He had never dreamed that the superintendent would betray him in any way. He thanked his lucky stars that he had had the inspiration to spend the night at the hotel, instead of returning to his boarding-house, for, of course, he understood now that Bowles must, undoubtedly, have given his real address to the detective.

He finished the rest of the newspaper article.

No one or ...d at the Crane residence who would- ...ed with the superintende... ...ilding. Gerald Cr... ...d bride, who h... ...ement- ...

sister ... ...y othe... lieved Mr ... oyce to...

Raynes thr... ... paper dow... It had taken ...ay his appetite, ... the necessity for food, he ate wh... ...e could, drank a cup of coffee, and started for the Jameson Trust Company.

He knew very little about safe deposit vaults, but he had a vague idea that the number on the key would correspond to the number on the box. He decided to ascertain if this were so, before he asked any questions.

With a pleasant smile and nod to the doorkeeper, Raynes walked through the door leading to the vaults with the air of one who had been accustomed to doing this sort of thing all his life.

But the doorkeeper had no recollection of having seen Raynes before. He stopped him with the question:

"Did you want to go into the vaults or to the banking department?"

"To the vaults," replied Raynes.

"You have a vault here?" asked the doorman.

"Yes," said Raynes boldly, "here is the key."

The doorman bent his head to look at the key in Raynes's hand.

"I don't think that's a key to one of our vaults," he said. "Are you sure you have come to the right place?"

"Yes," replied Raynes. "This is the Jameson Trust Company, isn't it?"

"It is," answered the doorman. "But that key wouldn't fit any vault down here, I'm sure. Perhaps you have the wrong key. In what name is the vault rented?"

Raynes hesitated a moment. He was certain that he had remembered correctly the name of the trust company written on the inside of the second envelope. Perhaps, he considered, while this key contained in the first envelope would open the vault, it was not the same shape or size as the other key which Bowles had found. He decided at any rate that to settle this matter he must tell the exact truth.

"The vault was rented in the name of Howard Joyce," he a-

The doorma- just been reading of t- case of He- He- it

-- tn-

here," he said "I will -- one up-stairs -t if there is any such name on the books.

"Hallo," he said a minute later to the book-clerk. "Do you know if there is any vault here rented to a man by the name of Howard Joyce?"

"No," came the reply after a short interval. "There is no such name on the books."

"I am very sorry," said the doorman turning to Raynes. "But you must have made a mistake in the name of the trust company, I think. Mr. Joyce has no vault here."

Raynes thanked him in a weak voice. What was he to do now? The problem held him in such thrall, that he did not realize that he was still sitting on the doorman's chair until the latter reminded him by a slight cough.

Then he got up and walked unsteadily out of the place. What was he to do next? Was it possible that he could have remembered the name incorrectly? He felt sure that it was not.

He wandered aimlessly about the streets, thinking so deeply that he ran into half a dozen people, and was only saved from sudden death at several crossings by the alertness of the traffic squad.

Just at what point in his maddening reverie the idea occurred to him he did not know. But it brought him to a sudden halt in front of a chemist's shop.

The message on the envelope had not given the address of the Jameson Trust Company!

Perhaps it was not the Jameson Trust Company of New York City! Doubtless, there were other Jameson Trust Companies in other cities.

He rushed impulsively into the shop and asked to be allowed to look at the telephone directories. With shaking fingers he turned the leaves. The directories covered six different cities, and Raynes's hurried examination revealed the astonishing fact that there was a Jameson Trust Company in each one.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FAITH OF A GIRL.

RAYNES made a note of the address of each of the six Jameson Trust Companies and returned to his hotel. On the way there he bought every extra offered him by the newsboys.

When he reached his room he read these before he gave any further consideration to his problem.

The first newspaper reassured him mightily.

JOYCE'S SECRETARY DISAPPEARS!

Believed To Be with Joyce. Cranes Still Insist on Foul Play.

Young Woman Will Not Believe Fiancé Has Deserted Her.

All the other extras, save one, only offered different theories for Mr. Joyce's disappearance, each followed with the paragraph in which it was stated that the Cranes denied the possibility of any of the theories being true.

The last one of the pile gave Raynes great satisfaction.

Twice this morning the deserted bride called up the office in the Bradford Building, but rang off immediately when she found that only a detective and a reporter were there. Later it was learned that a telegram had been sent to Raynes's boarding-house.

As it was sent from a station in the neighborhood of the Cranes' home, it is believed that this was a message from Miss Crane, which she sent when she failed to find the secretary in the office. The proprietress of the boarding-house refused to allow any one to open the telegram, so it could not be definitely learned if this were true.

At the Cranes' home, Gerald Crane flew into a temper when told that his sister had tried to speak to Raynes. He was so genuinely angry, that the interviewer felt certain that he could have known nothing of this move upon the part of his sister.

This story gaves Raynes a new idea upon which he at once acted. He must communicate with Mildred Crane. She was the only one whom he could trust in this matter, the only one who could help him.

He felt sure now that, like all overcareful men, Howard Joyce had omitted to name the city in which was the Jameson Trust Company from which he rented his vault, through an oversight. Or, reflected Raynes, he might have written that message on the inside of the envelope in the very city in which the Jameson Trust Company was, and so felt no necessity of naming its address.

Raynes knew that his employer was a stranger in New York City, but he had never been able to discover from whence he had come. He thought it highly probable that the Cranes would know, and he had solved the problem of the trust company to his own satisfaction by deciding that if he could discover the name of the city from which Joyce had moved to New York, that would be the town in which to find the Jameson Trust Company.

There was no one, however, of whom he could ask this information. If he came forward in any way to get it even, he was certain of having his plans frustrated. Besides, he knew that none of the Cranes, save, perhaps, Mildred, would tell him. The fact that she had such faith in her *fiancé*, and that she had tried to communicate with himself, was a sure indication, Raynes decided, that he could place his trust in her.

But how was he to ask this question? He dared not go to the house; he dared not telephone.

He decided that a letter was the safest method of communication. No doubt she received her mail unopened, and if he were careful to engage her attention in the very beginning she would not betray her correspondent in any way.

At any rate, he felt sure, this was the only thing he could do.

He could not follow out his employer's instructions without knowing in what city the Jameson Trust Company was located; he felt sure that Mildred Crane was the only one who could and would give him this information. He must make the hazard —if it failed, he would have the satisfaction of knowing that he had done his best. He wrote:

Do not start when you read this. Make no sign that this letter is at all out of the ordinary.

I am Franklin Raynes, Mr. Joyce's confidential secretary. I have read in to-day's papers that you have tried to communicate with me, and that is the reason for writing to you. It is very important that you give me some information which

which is information

and

to rend
digested
Mr. Joyce's d

I have the
not dare to w
will not betr
confidence,
charged w

which I do not understand in the least. I believe its fulfilment will lead to his return, which both you and I wish for more than any one else, perhaps.

But Mr. Joyce made one fatal omission in his instructions to me. It is absolutely necessary for me to know the name of the city in which he lived before he came to New York City. This he failed to tell me. I feel certain that you must know it, and I beg you to give me its name. Do not try to communicate with me again by telephone.

As you doubtless know, it is dangerous to use your own wire or a public booth. The only safe method of communication is a personal in the newspaper. If you will insert to-night, or at the latest to-morrow morning, merely the name of the city from which Mr. Joyce originally came, and sign it with the initial "T," I shall understand, and I believe that in a few days thereafter Mr. Joyce will return to us. I know I am doing a very risky thing in writing this to you, but I trust to your honor not to betray me, if you do not feel inclined to give me the information I require.

Raynes mailed this letter as soon as he had written it, and then impatiently awaited the result. He knew now that he had made an extremely wise move in engaging a room at this hotel, and that his best policy was to keep out of sight.

His anxiety as to the result of his letter to Miss Crane was not likely to give him a pleasant afternoon or evening. He had sent the letter by special delivery, but he hardly expected an answer in that day's paper.

He must wait until the morning for the reply, which would be the third day since Mr. Joyce's disappearance, he reflected. Cold perspiration came out upon his brow. Would that give him time in which to execute his employer's commands? What could he have meant by that third or fourth day limitation?

Raynes kept on for he believed that th... ...rs would help him to ... He a... ...ol-

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looked at the paper. The first glance caused him to totter into a chair.

MISS CRANE RECEIVES LETTER FROM SECRETARY.

She had betrayed him then.

He dropped the newspaper through his hands and held his head with them. Why had he been such a fool?

Calmer reflection, the next moment, reminded him that he had not given her his address, so that she could not have given him away to that extent. Then he read the article. It ran:

At four o'clock this afternoon a letter arrived by special delivery for Miss Mildred Crane. It had been mailed at a station in the neighborhood, as was discovered later, but the mailing-clerk could not remember the appearance of the person who had mailed it, except that he was a fair young man.

Franklin Raynes has a fair complexion, but Howard Joyce is very dark. An immediate inquiry at the Crane mansion was answered curtly to the effect that if Miss Crane had just received a letter, no one else in the house knew from whom it had come, or what it contained.

When the interviewer requested some reply from Miss Crane upon the subject, he was told that she was too ill to see any one.

Half an hour later, however, two young women heavily veiled, left the house. As the only young woman in the Crane household is Miss Mildred Crane, it was surmised that one of these young women must be she. Even through the veil the reporter could make out her regular features.

The other young woman was doubtless her maid. When Gerald Crane was informed that his sister had left the house, he became instantly furious and declared that she was still ill in her room.

The two young women walked to the next block and entered a telegraph office, where they gave a message already written and sealed to one of the boys. This message was carried to a newspaper office and proved to be a personal advertisement. It was very short, merely, "Rochester, T."

CHAPTER IX.

RAYNES OBEYS INSTRUCTIONS.

ONLY the greatest self-control prevented Raynes from shouting. Mildred Crane had not betrayed him. She had answered him.

There was a Jameson Trust Company in Rochester.

Raynes crumpled the papers into a bundle which he thrust into the wastepaper-basket. He went to the telephone and asked for a time-table.

When it was brought he searched it at once for the trains to Rochester. The next one left at midnight. He had more than three hours to wait. He decided to spend them in rest and reflection upon the step he was about to take.

But careful consideration brought his rest to a sudden end. If the detectives were watching for him at the Bradford Building and his boarding-house, they were surely watching for him at railroad-stations and steamboat-piers. The detectives of other cities would also have been warned to look out for him.

Why had he forgotten that possibility? What was he to do now? He must board the train to Rochester from some point other than the Grand Central Station. He could only do this at One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Street. He thought it hardly likely that the detectives would think of watching that station.

The idea occurred to him to disguise himself with a false beard and wig. But he would not have known where to purchase such things even in the daytime, and at this hour it was out of the question.

He must go as he was, and trust to luck. It favored him.

He saw no one at the One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Street station, save the ticket-agent. Raynes was the only one to board the train there, and he went at once to his berth in the sleeping-car.

But he did not close his eyes for several hours. He had to consider the matter of leaving the car before it reached Rochester. He was entirely unfamiliar with that city and its environs. He would have no way of knowing when the train should be approaching it, except by the time. The train was scheduled to arrive at five minutes past nine the following morning. The station just before Rochester was Syracuse, a city large enough to justify his fear that detectives might be watching the incoming trains there.

Finally a plan occurred to him. Doubtless, as the train should approach Rochester, it would slow down. As soon as Syracuse had been passed, he would go to the door and watch for this. Then he would leave the train immediately and enter Rochester on foot.

At an early hour he went to the dining-car and hastily ate his breakfast. Then he went forward to one of the day-coaches.

It happened to be quite full, so he had a good excuse to remain standing by the door. The conductor, coming through to punch the tickets, suggested that Raynes would find a seat in the smoking-car. But Raynes replied that smoke made him dizzy. The conductor glanced sharply at him and went on.

The train slowed down and Raynes jumped carefully from the platform. He found a road which led directly into the city, and in a very little while he saw a street sign which gave him a clue to his whereabouts. Fifteen minutes later he presented himself at the Jameson Trust Company.

This time he decided to mention no names whatever, if he could avoid it.

He went at once to the attendant at the door of the safe-deposit department.

"I have not been here in a long time," he said pleasantly. "Doubtless you have forgotten me."

The attendant was very deferential. He could not remember that he had ever seen the smiling young man before, but he did not say so. He had a distinguished, though youthful, appearance, and the attendant felt certain that he must be a person of importance.

"Not at all, not at all," replied the attendant.

"I suppose my vault is in the same old place," said Raynes, carelessly jingling the keys on his ring.

"Of course," said the attendant, laughing. "The vaults never change places."

"Well, I'll go down and look at it," said Raynes, passing him. "I haven't tried the key in so long, I wonder if it will fit."

He held it up as he spoke, so that the attendant could see it quite well.

"It will fit, sir," said the attendant, smiling at what he understood to be a joke. "The locks are never altered unless a key is lost or the vault given up."

"All right," said Raynes. "Thank you."

He ran quickly down the stairs; his heart was beating wildly. The attendant had not noticed anything strange about the key; Raynes congratulated himself that he had hit upon the right clue to the safe-depos company.

But he had not the faintest idea find the box. He dared not m

name of Harold Joyce, and he soon discovered that the number of the key had nothing to do with the numbers on the boxes.

Raynes had plunged into the farthest recesses of the place at first, and with trembling fingers tried several of the locks with his key. But it fitted none of them.

He looked round in despair; he had naturally thought of this difficulty, but he had trusted to his luck to help him. It seemed to have deserted him now.

For a few minutes he stood in deep thought, then he returned to the attendant at the door.

"I can't find that box after all," he said pleasantly. "Will you help me?"

"Certainly," replied the attendant, taking the key away from him. "I think I know what box it must be. It's this one over in the corner, right here by the door. I know it hasn't been opened in several months."

He inserted the key in the lock and triumphantly turned it.

"That's it! That's the one, sir!" he said, greatly pleased with himself.

"Thank you, very, very much," said Raynes in heartfelt tones.

The attendant smiled, murmured that it was nothing, and returned to his place. Raynes knew that he could be distinctly seen from the door. The box was in an extremely public situation. There was no time to examine the contents or to destroy documents.

He lifted the long envelopes, one after the other, from the the box, and put them in his inside pocket. One was marked "money," another "securities," and the third was blank.

He gave one more glance into the box to see that nothing was left, locked it and went back to the door.

"You have rendered me a great service," he said to the man. "I shall not forget it."

His tone was so earnest that the man looked up in surprise. But he smiled and touched his cap as Raynes walked away.

This is the afternoon of the third day, thought Raynes. He decided not to return to New York until evening, nor until he had examined the three envelopes.

He would engage a room at a hotel, he determined, make sure that he had secured the right articles, then take the trolley back to Syracuse and board the half past seven ·ain to New York, leaving it next morning ·he One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth ·tation.

He then carried out the first part of his program.

There was no difficulty about securing a room in the first hotel he entered. He locked the door and sat down to examine the contents of the two envelopes marked "securities" and "money." He opened the former first. It contained stocks and bonds made out in the name of Harold Joyce.

He opened the second envelope. It contained five thousand dollars in bills. This he put carefully away in his pocket with the first envelope. Then he turned his attention to the third envelope.

As it was entirely blank there was little to look at, but he stared at it for a long time.

He inserted his knife in the corner of the envelope and slit it open. A single sheet of paper was all it contained, but Raynes set himself at once to peruse this single sheet.

It did not take long to read it through, and he read it again.

When he had finished, a curious expression of relief crossed his face. He folded the paper carefully, returned it to the envelope, and put it in his pocket with the others.

Then he walked out of the hotel, took a car to the railroad station, and openly bought a through ticket to New York.

CHAPTER X.

RAYNES WRITES AGAIN.

NATURALLY the police of Rochester were not looking for a fair young man to leave that town; they were watching for one who should enter it. So Raynes reached New York in comfort. There were no detectives on the train.

As soon as he arrived in the Grand Central Station, however, he knew that he had attracted attention.

He took a cab and drove straight to his boarding-house. He was conscious that some one else had taken a cab and followed as straight a route.

But he had lost all his nervousness; the clumsy dodging of the men who were shadowing him when he looked round at them at his door-step made him smile.

His landlady greeted him with enthusiasm. She was so glad, she declared, to know that he had not met with the fate of Harold Joyce, his employer.

"Where on earth," she exclaimed, unable

to conceal her curiosity in regard to the chief news item of the day, "do you suppose the poor man is, Mr. Raynes?"

"Oh, somewhere on earth," replied Mr. Raynes indifferently.

"You don't think anything dreadful has happened to him?" she continued.

"It is not my place to think aloud of Mr. Joyce's affairs," declared Raynes. "Please remember, madam, that I am his confidential secretary."

This reply convinced the landlady that Mr. Raynes was a far deeper young man than she had suspected, and that he had doubtless been cognizant of his employer's whereabouts at all times.

Raynes cared little for his landlady's opinion. He was in a hurry to communicate with some one of greater importance to him.

As soon as he reached his room he seated himself at his desk and wrote a letter.

MY DEAR MISS CRANE:

Your prompt reply to my letter enabled me to follow the instructions which Mr. Joyce had left with me. It also put me in possession of some information which I desire to communicate to you before I proceed further in this matter.

It is, believe me, of the utmost importance that you should know the matter I have to communicate to you. It is also highly important that you alone should hear it. I will not divulge it to you unless you promise me absolute secrecy.

I am not hiding from the detectives now. I do not care how carefully they watch me. I have done all that Mr. Joyce asked me to do, and have done it without the knowledge of any one save myself. I only desire now to acquaint you with the facts which I have discovered. If you will appoint an hour and guarantee privacy, I shall be glad to call upon you at any time to-day.

Awaiting your commands, I am

Your obedient servant,

FRANKLIN RAYNES.

This letter he despatched by a messenger-boy, and, watching from the window, was much amused to see a man start in pursuit of the boy at the corner.

In less than an hour the boy returned with a message.

I am waiting for you now. Please come at once. I promise you absolute secrecy.

Raynes called a cab, and left the house. Two other cabs followed close behind. As he paid the cabman at the Crane doorstep he was conscious that some one took his photograph.

Miss Crane received him in a small room on the second floor. She had been waiting, and rose as he entered.

He had known that she must be very beautiful from her photographs, but he was surprised to see how little justice they had done her. She had the kind of beauty which quite overwhelms all beholders and magnetizes as well as pleases.

"Miss Crane," he began, "what I am about to disclose to you may pain you very deeply, and before I begin I want to say that I am certain that Mr. Joyce loved you more than life itself."

"Thank you, thank you," replied the young woman. "In spite of his strange disappearance, I have never doubted that for a moment. I am glad to have your reassurance, nevertheless. But, tell me, does what you have discovered convince you that Mr. Joyce is dead?"

"No," said Raynes, "it does not."

"Does it convince you that he is alive?"

"It makes me hope that he is alive," replied Raynes, emphasizing hope.

Miss Crane sighed deeply.

"Very well," she said. "Go on with what you have to tell me."

"Miss Crane," said Raynes, "long before Mr. Joyce's disappearance I had reason to believe that he expected to disappear."

"Why do you say that?" she cried.

"Because he gave me some very impressive instructions as to what to do in case he disappeared."

"Did his instructions give you any clue as to his reason for disappearing?"

"None whatever."

"Have you followed those instructions?"

"To the letter. I have only disobeyed one of them."

"What was that?"

"He most emphatically impressed upon me the necessity for destroying a certain envelope which he told me I should find among his papers. I have not destroyed it—I have opened it and read its contents, contrary to his instructions."

"Oh!" exclaimed Miss Crane. "They give you the clue to his disappearance? It is something to do with that that you have to tell me?"

"Yes," said Raynes. "Do you wish to hear what it is?"

For a few minutes Miss Crane was silent; then she began to speak in a l trembling voice.

"I have every confidence in y

Raynes. I believe you are devoted to Mr. Joyce. You know that I love him dearly. Would it benefit him if I should hear what you have discovered?"

"It might," said Raynes, "and it might not. Only, I feel that the request I have come here to make of you will be refused if I do not give you a good reason for it."

"Perhaps not," said Miss Crane. "Please explain yourself fully."

"I am in possession of facts, then, which imply that there are reasons for Mr. Joyce's disappearance. I also believe that he will return to-day or to-morrow if the way is opened for him to do so."

Miss Crane sprang from her chair.

"Return!" she cried. "To-day or to-morrow! Oh, tell me what you mean? Can I help to bring him back?"

"Yes," said Raynes eagerly. "You can bring him back at once if you will."

"How—how?" she cried.

"In this way. I believe that Mr. Joyce is where he can read the New York newspapers. I believe that if he reads in one of them that you know of the reasons for his disappearance, but are anxious for him to return notwithstanding, that he will come back at once."

Miss Crane clasped and unclasped her hands excitedly.

"Oh, let them print that at once—let them print anything which will bring him back," she cried.

Raynes stood up.

"The reporters are on the door-step," he said. "Shall I ask them to come in?"

"Yes, yes—at once."

"You will not say anything, but allow me to dictate the interview, and simply say 'yes' to everything I say?"

"Yes, yes—certainly."

"But your brother will not approve," he suggested.

"My brother!" she cried wildly. "What is my brother's approval to Harold Joyce's return?"

CHAPTER XI.

THE INTERVIEW.

NEW YORK reporters are accustomed to sudden changes of front upon the part of the besieged. They were not ll surprised when Raynes appeared smi- at the door of the Cranes' home and hem to enter.

They even concealed whatever slight astonishment they might have felt when they found that Miss Crane herself was to give the interview.

The spokesman of the aggregation first apologized to Miss Crane for having bothered her at such a trying time, but she sat with shining eyes looking far past him, and heard nothing of his hackneyed apology.

"Now, gentlemen," said Raynes, "kindly proceed as quickly as possible."

"We understand," said the spokesman reporter, "that you have a clue to Mr. Joyce's whereabouts."

"Yes," said Raynes, "Miss Crane has recently received very decisive information. That is so, Miss Crane?"

"Yes, yes," she said nervously.

"Are you now ready to tell us what that clue is?"

"Yes," said Raynes. "We understand that Mr. Joyce is in hiding somewhere."

"In the city?" queried the reporter.

"Yes, somewhere in New York City."

"Do you know the exact place?"

"Yes," said Raynes slowly. "He has been at the Hotel Bethune for the last four days."

Miss Crane started, as well as the reporters.

The Hotel Bethune was only two blocks away from the Crane house, and was one of the largest and best known in the city.

"Has he been living there under an assumed name?" asked the reporter.

"No," replied Raynes. "He was under no necessity to do that. No one would have thought of looking for him there."

"How did you think of it?"

Raynes smiled.

"We have not looked for him. We have always known where he was."

Again he looked to Miss Crane to confirm him.

She was entirely at sea as to what Raynes could possibly mean, but she nodded the affirmation which was expected of her.

"This is a most extraordinary statement," said one of the reporters. "Mr. Gerald Crane was the first and only one interested in the matter to put detectives on the track of Mr. Joyce."

"Which was entirely contrary to Miss Crane's wishes," said Raynes. He looked at her, and again she nodded assent. She was barely able to conceal her surprise at the remarkable things he was forcing her to testify to.

"Well," said the reporter, "are you willing to tell us what motives Mr. Joyce could possibly have for concealing himself?"

"Yes," answered Raynes. "His act was dictated by conscientious scruples. Mr. Joyce had discovered that there was a secret skeleton in his family cupboard. Up to the time of his disappearance he had believed it best to allow his bride to remain in ignorance of that skeleton. But on that day he decided to tell her the truth. It was Miss Crane's hesitation about forgiving his former concealment which caused him to disappear temporarily. She has now entirely forgiven him, and the mystery which has stirred New York so deeply is a mystery no longer. Mr. Joyce will return to his affianced bride late this afternoon."

The reporters were trained to conceal surprise and incredulity, and Miss Crane had had some social experience in that regard. But neither of them could avoid staring at Raynes as he smilingly uttered these extraordinary statements.

"That, gentlemen," he said, "is all we have to say to-day. To-morrow you will be able to interview Mr. Joyce himself."

The reporters thanked him, and rushed away to their respective offices, not before each had looked at the other and asked what it really meant.

When the door had closed upon them Miss Crane could not longer conceal her astonishment.

"You amaze me," she said. "Were you speaking the truth? Has Mr. Joyce been at the Bethune all this time?"

"Certainly not," replied Raynes, "but that will send the reporters rushing to one part of the city while he quietly comes back from another part."

"Then, you believe that he will come back? That part is true?"

"Yes," said Raynes, "that part is true, I am sure. As soon as he sees that interview he will come back. It is the assurance of your love and faith which he must have before he returns."

Two hours later the extras were again abroad upon the streets. The reporters had branded the whole interview as fake, but they gave it just the same.

Each and every one had been assured that Harold Joyce had not been seen even for one minute at the Hotel Bethune.

Meanwhile, Raynes had gone to the Bradford Building. He found the superintendent, Bowles, at the entrance, and seemed quite pleased to see him. The latter returned his greetings in some surprise.

"You know," he began, "those newspaper men get things all mixed up."

"Oh," said Raynes, "you mean about your giving my address to the detectives and watching me while I searched the office that night. Oh, that's all right. I'd do as much for you, you know."

Thus smilingly reechoing the superintendent's words, Raynes walked past him to the elevators and went up to the eighth floor.

Room 813 was empty, for the detectives and reporters had been busier elsewhere.

Raynes tidied the room up a bit; placed the letters in a neat little pile on the desk; rearranged the chairs, picked up the cigarette ends, and generally brought neatness out of the chaos the busybodies had left behind them. Then he seated himself at his favorite window and contemplated the busy life of Broadway.

Presently he saw the people in the streets pause and make way for some one who was running. He rose from his chair and leaned out of the window. Whoever it was entered the Bradford Building. Two minutes later the car stopped at the eighth floor.

Deathly pale, Raynes wheeled about and faced the door.

It was flung violently open, and Harold Joyce, bloodshot and disheveled, flung himself into the room.

"Raynes," he cried, "lock the door and keep those bloodhounds out!"

He fell headlong into the chair at his desk.

Raynes ran past him and fastened the door. He shut the transom and, climbing on a chair, hung his overcoat over the glass.

Then he turned round to his employer.

Joyce was panting horribly, as if his heart would break through his body.

Raynes placed his hand upon his employer's shoulder.

"You are safe now," he said. "Keep quiet. No one but you and I need ever know anything."

CHAPTER XII.

WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?

FOR a long time no sound or sign of life came from Harold Joyce, save heavy breathing. Raynes seated himself and waited.

Joyce finally raised his head.

"Raynes," he said hoarsely, "have you got anything to drink here?"

"I never touch liquor," said Raynes. "I can get you a glass of ice-water if that will do you."

"Anything, anything!" cried Joyce.

He drank it greedily. When he had finished, Raynes, who had seated himself, again asked without ceremony:

"Where have you been?"

"Heaven knows!" cried Joyce. "I don't. I didn't even stop to find out when I came away from the place. Raynes, some one kidnaped me."

Raynes did not reply. He looked questioningly at his employer.

"Don't you believe me?" cried Joyce.

"It is not a question of my faith in you, sir," said Raynes. "It is a question of what others will believe. It always seems strange when a man disappears almost at the very altar."

"Heavens!" cried Joyce. "No one even suspects that I would desert my *fiancée*, that I—"

He paused, overwhelmed with the idea.

"Haven't you seen the newspapers?" asked Raynes.

"Not one."

"You don't know the stories that have been printed about you?"

"I know nothing."

"You have no idea of the misery you have wrought in the Crane household, the suspense you have caused Miss Crane, and the anxiety that I have been in?"

"I know nothing," cried Joyce. "I don't even know what day of the week this is, nor how long I had been away when I woke up."

"Oh, you woke up!" said Raynes significantly. "Where did you wake up?"

"In a small room in a house near Battery Park. I woke up about an hour ago. The sun was shining directly on my face. I jumped up with an idea that I was late for something. Then I felt bewildered; my head swam as if I had been drugged or hit a hard blow with a blunt weapon of some sort. I had to sit down again on the miserable little couch on which I had been lying.

"I looked round the room and saw that everything was strange to me. Then I saw a mirror; with almost superhuman effort I forced myself to it and looked in. I saw what I see now. I nearly fainted. Then I realized the truth. I had been drugged and kidnaped.

"I rushed to the door—to my great surprise, it opened at my first touch. I had not been locked in. I rushed frantically down-stairs, fearing I would be late for my wedding. Of course I am late. How shall I explain to that dear girl? What will she think?"

"That your explanations are four days late," said Raynes.

"You mean to tell me that I have been lying in that wretched room for four days?"

"How do I know where you have been for four days?" asked Raynes.

"Heavens!" Joyce shuddered down into his chair. "If you do not believe me, what can I expect from her?"

"Perhaps she will have greater faith than I," said Raynes. "Read this."

He spread out on the desk the latest afternoon paper, containing the interview which he had urged Miss Crane to give to the reporters.

Joyce read it with groans and exclamations.

"Thank Heaven," he said, "that she retains her faith in me; but how could she make such extraordinary statements?"

"We thought it best," said Raynes very quietly.

"We?" exclaimed Joyce.

"Yes, Miss Crane has been guided in this matter entirely by my advice. I succeeded in convincing her that I had your best interests and hers at heart."

Joyce held out his hand.

"I thank you," he cried. "I thank you from the bottom of my heart if you have been able to help that angel in this trying time. These four days must have been dreadful for her."

"They have," replied Raynes.

"Four days, good Heavens!" Joyce repeated the words with evident horror, but their repetition seemed to awaken a new thought. He raised his eyes suddenly to Raynes's. "I have been absent four days," he said in a sort of daze.

"Yes," assented Raynes.

Joyce paused.

"Do you remember that I gave you some instructions to carry out in case of my death or disappearance?"

"Yes," replied Raynes. "I remember very well."

The feverish look in Joyce's eyes gave way to anxiety.

"This is the fourth day of my disappearance," he said. "You have not had time to carry them out."

"Yes," said Raynes, "I have fulfilled your instructions to the letter. I did not wait for the fourth day."

"You opened the envelopes?"

"Yes."

"You found the keys?"

"Yes."

"Have you been to Rochester?"

"I have."

"What did you find?"

Raynes drew two envelopes from his pocket; one was marked "securities," the other "money." He held them up for Joyce to look at, but did not put them on the desk.

"These," he said calmly.

"Where is the third envelope?" cried Joyce. "What did you do with it?"

"I took that to Miss Mildred Crane," said Raynes.

Joyce was silent in horror.

"That's what she means in the interview, then?" he cried. "Why did you do such a thing? Why, of all people, did you take it to Miss Crane?"

"I had my reasons. But she is still ignorant of its contents. I brought it away unread. She refused to know anything about it without your permission."

Joyce's eyes almost became natural again.

"Thank Heaven!" he cried, "she is the one woman. Then what have you done with it now?"

"I have it here," said Raynes, pulling the envelope a little way out of his pocket and then pushing it back.

"Give it to me," cried Joyce.

"In a minute," replied Raynes. "There is a little more to say before I give it to you. Its contents are interesting, but not as interesting to me as a few other things. Will you kindly tell me first where you were when the kidnaping occurred?"

"I had just left my *fiancée's* home," replied Joyce. "That is all I know. I can remember nothing after walking about a block from the house. I don't know what happened to me after that."

"It would be impossible for you to identify your assailant?"

"Absolutely. Why? Have you any clue to him?"

"Yes," said Raynes. "I know him very well indeed."

"You do? You are a jewel, Raynes. Who is he?"

"His name," replied the secretary, "is Franklin Raynes."

Joyce looked at him blankly.

"Are you joking?" he asked.

"No," replied Raynes easily. "This is no joke to me. It is quite serious business."

"You mean to say—"

"Just this. The portion of your instructions which you were so careful to give me in the event of your disappearance which should interest me most was the directions in regard to this envelope." He again held up the one containing money. "Do you realize that you suggested to me then a very easy way to get a few thousand dollars?"

"Yes," said Joyce, "I see that now. I didn't then. I tempted you, I admit it. But why did you cause me to disappear on the day before my wedding?"

"Because the writer of the letter contained in the long, plain envelope did not wish you to show it to your bride."

"You—you know the writer of that letter?" Joyce looked at Raynes with amazement.

"Very well," replied the latter. "I saw the letter when it was written. I only glanced at it once in Rochester to be certain that it was the right one, but I can repeat it to you word for word.

"It is written on the stationery used by the inmates of the prison at New Orleans. It is dated June the fifth of last year. It reads:

MY DEAR BROTHER:

This salutation would be ridiculous if you had not cost me so dearly. Your exemplary life, contrasting with mine, has cost me the love and confidence of our parents. Your conscientious scruples have put me in jail. What right had you to be better than I?

What right had you to emphasize the difference between us, until all those who should have loved me, hated me; so that I grew more and more reckless until my folly and your tattling tongue caused me to reach this depth, a common prison. The longer I remain here the more I detest you.

There are not enough known methods of revenge to satisfy my hatred for you. My sentence will be finished on the first of next January. Then I shall find you wherever you are, and by that time I shall have devised the most cruel method of revenge that any human being has ever invented.

DONALD JOYCE.

"Yes," cried Joyce, "that is the word for word. It is graven on my It was written by my brother—a

Some years ago—almost ten—he committed a forgery, which I, though at the time in a different part of the country, was unfortunate enough to discover. My agency in the punishment which later was meted out to him has been one of the harrowing sorrows of my life.

"When apprehended, my brother took an assumed name, and under this alias was tried, convicted, and imprisoned. My father and mother, however, felt the shame and came to me, who had by that time moved from New Orleans to Rochester, and there they both died, broken-hearted."

"What became of your brother?" asked Raynes.

Joyce shuddered.

"I don't know. You see, I hadn't seen the boy since he was a little child. I was a great many years older than he, and when I left home to make my way in the world he he was still a schoolboy in knickerbockers. I might for all I know be passing him daily on the street, yet be prevented, through ignorance of him, from putting out a helping hand.

"Then, too, the letter, couched in its so bitter terms, awakened in me terrific fear, for I don't know what insane desire for vengeance may have been fostered in this sensitive youth, both by the thought that I, his only brother, was an instrument in his punishment and by the rigors of prison life.

"The letter was forwarded to me from the New Orleans post-office, thus proving that my brother was unaware that we had left our home town. Yet I feared to remain in Rochester after the time that Donald's term should end. So I came to New York. Even here I did not feel safe.

"At any moment I expected to be the victim of his revenge. I left the letter in the safe-deposit vault and gave you those instructions in regard to it, so that if anything should happen to me my friends might have a clue to the culprit. But why were you so interested in the letter?"

"Because," said Raynes, "the one who wrote it is a changed man. He no longer hungers for revenge. He asks for forgiveness. He desires all records of the past destroyed. He begs for a new, clean slate to write upon."

Raynes spoke in a low, earnest tone, and Joyce was very much affected.

"If he were here," said the older man, "he should have all the forgiveness and all the clean slates he could desire. My heart is hungry for him. But how do you know so much about him? How long have you known my brother?"

"As long as I have known myself," was the reply. "Five years make a great difference in a boy, remember. Look at me. See if you can recognize me.

"I am your brother Donald."

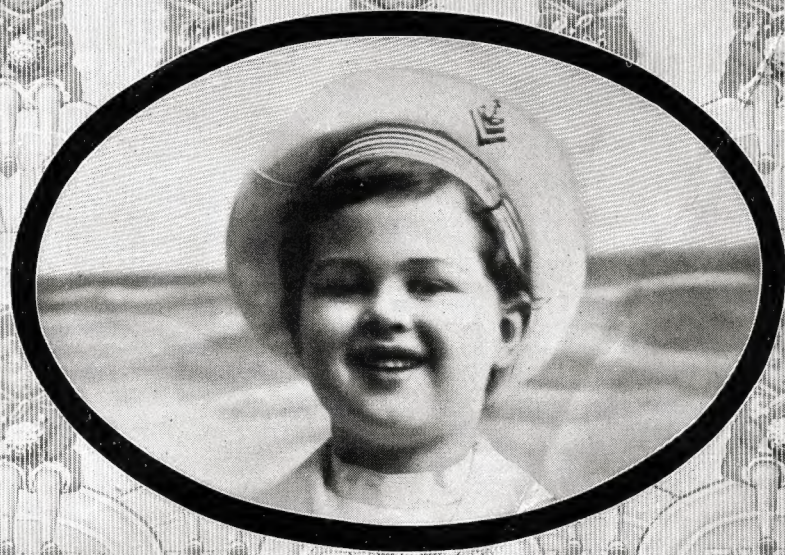
(The end.)

WHEN SYLVIA SAYS GOOD NIGHT.

'Tis not in the ballroom's dazzling glare,
  In gossamer laces dressed,
With nodding plumes in her golden hair,
  I love my Sylvia best;
'Tis at the foot of the winding stair
  When Sylvia says "Good night!"
And floats away in the shadows gray
  With her twinkling candle-light.

I stand below in the empty hall—
  Grim are the shadows and dark;
And the twinkling light grows dim and small,
  And dies to a distant spark.
I well-nigh envy the waxen thing
  That lendeth my love its light,
And sheds its glare on her golden hair,
  When Sylvia says "Good night!"

Hattie Whitney.



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